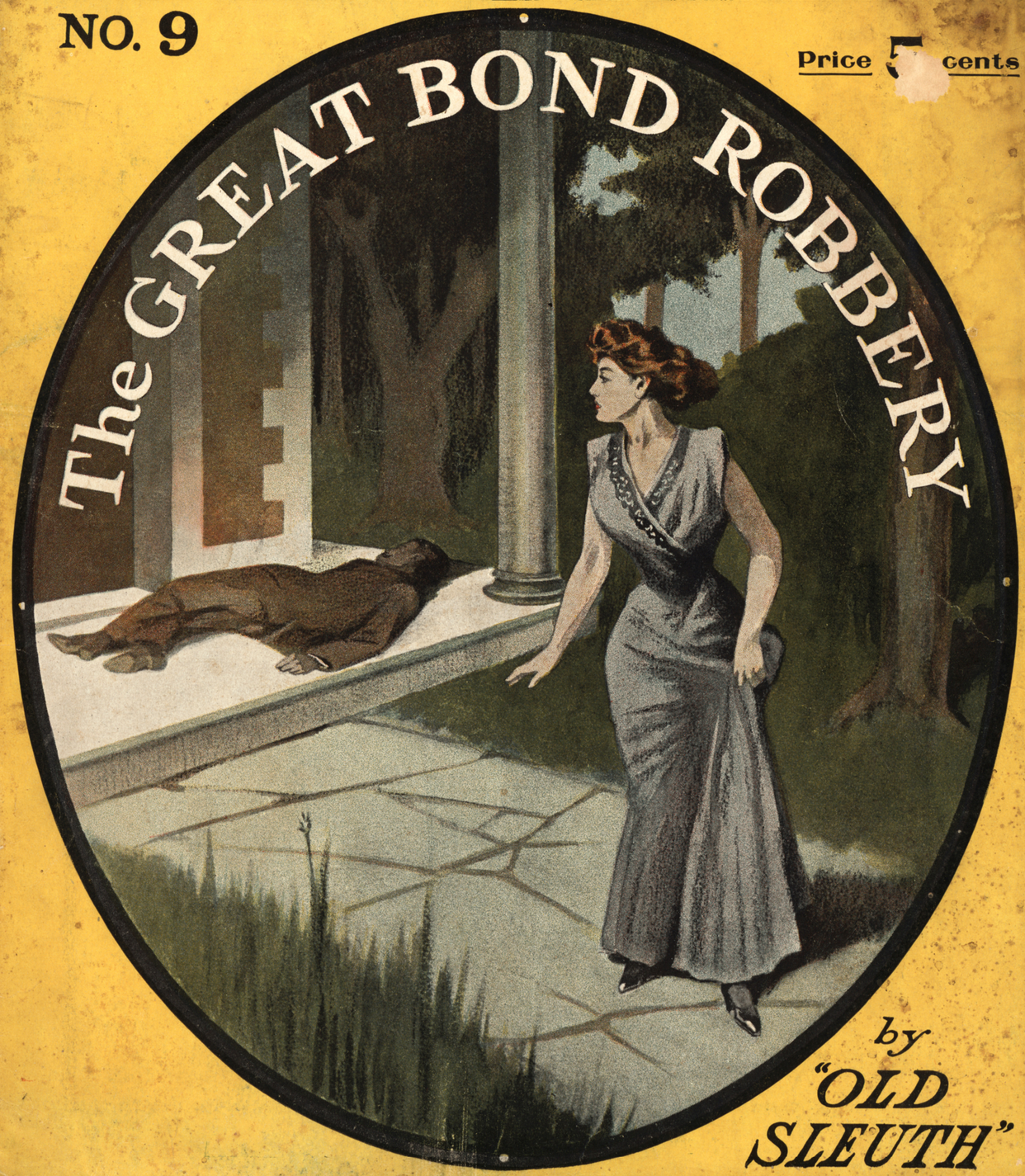
OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

NO. 9

Price 5 cents

The GREAT BOND ROBBERY



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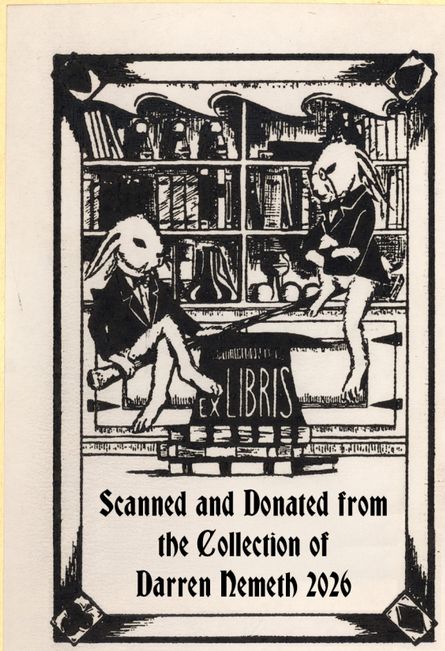

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OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

A Series of

THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED

No. 9. || THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A. AUGUST 7th, 1908. || Vol. I.

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THE GREAT BOND ROBBERY

OR

TRACKED BY A FEMALE DETECTIVE.

By "OLD SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

THE CHIEF DETECTIVE'S STORY.

CAPTAIN J. S. YOUNG, once chief of the New York detective force, and, at the time we write, head of a private detective agency, sat in his private office, thinking over the various aspects of a case that had just been presented to him, when there came a low rap at his office door.

As a rule, the great detective was as inaccessible to ordinary visitors as the Emperor of all the Russias; but the rap for admittance mentioned was accompanied by a little private signal that caused him to exclaim:

"Come in!"

The door opened, and a woman, closely veiled and of most graceful figure, glided into the great thief-taker's presence.

"Thank Heaven! Miss Kate, of all people on the face of the earth, you are the one I was the most anxious to see!"

"I am here, chief, and at your service," came the reply, in a sweet, pleasant voice.

As the woman spoke she cast aside her veil, and disclosed a face of rare beauty and intelligence.

One would have expected to have met such a lovely being under the glare of gas-jets, glittering in silks and jewels, rather than in a detective office, at night, plainly clad.

She was not more than three-and-twenty, and nothing in her beautiful countenance seemed to indicate that she possessed the courage, cunning, patience, endurance and sagacity of the most experienced officer on the whole detective force.

Kate Goelet's life had been a romance from the hour that she was born until the moment when, as described, in a quiet manner she glided into the presence of the great detective chief.

"Are you engaged at present, Miss Kate?" asked the detective.

"I am not; I dropped in to see if you had anything on hand."

"I have; and I was thinking of you in connection with the affair when, like an apparition, you came gliding into my presence."

"What is it—a murder?"

"No."

"I am glad of that! I have just been working up a murder case, and I am soul-sick with horrors."

"All your sympathies have been enlisted, as usual, for some poor devil, I suppose?"

"No; my sympathies this time were aroused for the innocent victim of a most dreadful crime. But enough; it is over, as far as I am concerned, and I am glad that you have a job for me on another lay."

"Well, Kate, you always said that your profession was distasteful to you; that you would like to make a big stake and quit it?"

"Your memory serves you correctly; it's strange that a person of my organization should have drifted into my present employment, but I have been a woman of such strange fortunes that I am prepared for anything that may come; but to business."

"All I was going to say was that if you succeed in the business in hand you will make a stake that will enable you to pull out."

"I hope I may succeed!" murmured the woman as a sigh issued from her lips and a shadow fell upon her beautiful face.

"One of the richest banking-houses in New York has fallen victim to a defaulter; the amount stolen is nearly a million."

"A large haul."

"Indeed it is; and the peculiarity of the case consists in the fact that the company have discovered their loss unbeknown to the defaulter, who is still in their employ."

"What do they want of a detective then? Why don't they close in on the thief?"

"They want their bonds and money back; that's why they don't close in on the thief."

"How do they expect to get them?"

"I'll tell you. There is a woman in the case, a cunning she-devil who has led the young man to his ruin; they want to run her close in shore, and drop to the hiding-place of the bonds; it's a case where a naturally noble young man has been beguiled and ruined by a beautiful fraud."

Kate Goelet was thoughtful a moment, and then in a sad tone, she murmured:

"It's going to be a trying case, I see."

"You will receive ten per cent. of every dollar you recover. Go it, you can win. I have thought the case over well. What do you say?"

"Am at your service, and ready for orders."

"Good! I know that when once you start you'll go through, and your first point will be to ring in an acquaintance with Henry Wilbur."

"Henry Wilbur is the thief?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen him?"

"Here is his picture!" and the chief handed a *carte-de-visite* to the lady detective.

The latter glanced at the pictured face, and a sad look glimmered into her beautiful blue eyes as she murmured: "What a handsome man! what an honest, open face! I tell you, chief, there is a mistake here; no woman in the world could allure the original of that picture to crime!"

"You will learn differently when you have worked awhile on the case."

"The directors think they have this young man 'dead to rights,' eh?"

"They have evidence that would convict an angel!"

"Mark my words, chief, I have an inspiration in this matter; that young man is not a criminal! remember my words!"

"You're wrong once, Miss Kate. I've studied this case, but I see, as usual, your sympathies are aroused, and now let me tell you something. The directors believe that Henry Wilbur is but the victim of a siren; recover the money, and you save him from punishment; fail, and they will be compelled to close in on him!"

The strange, beautiful woman was silent a moment, but at length she said, after having studied the picture awhile:

"I'll recover the bonds, or at least trace them up; and I'll not only save that young man from prison, but I'll prove him as innocent as you or I. Mark my words, chief!"

Although Captain Young was, at the time we write, only the head of a private detective agency, he was always addressed as chief, from the fact of his long service as chief of the New York police under the Metropolitan Board, where he had obtained the reputation of being a second Fouché.

Kate Goelet remained an hour in conversation with the chief, during which time she learned all the details of the great defalcation.

There was one great mystery in the whole affair—although it was known that a *woman was in the case*, no one had been able to find out who she was.

Henry Wilbur had been "piped" day in and day out, and yet had never been tracked to the lair of the siren who had wrought his ruin, and led him to steal from the bank a million in bonds.

The stolen bonds were not the property of the bank, but were owned by a depositor, who was not at the time aware of his loss, the officials being determined to keep the terrible truth from him until every effort had been exhausted to recover them.

When Kate Goelet, the lady detective, left the presence of Captain Young, she carried with her the photograph of Henry Wilbur.

It was after midnight, and only a woman of her profession and experience would have dared to pass through the streets at such an hour.

She, however, was perfectly capable of taking care of herself, and she had not been half an hour from the presence of the chief when she was put to the test.

For reasons of her own, she had determined to walk instead of taking a conveyance to her lodgings.

She had a little business on hand that carried her up Broadway.

Kate Goelet had reached the corner of Broadway and Howard Street, and was proceeding rapidly along, with her veil drawn down, when she passed a company of young men standing upon the sidewalk in front of a place which she recognized as a famous resort for gamblers and fast men about town.

The men were standing directly under a gas-light, and as the lady detective passed them, her glances fell upon one of their number.

Her heart stood still.

Her last words to Chief Young had been:

"I will prove that Henry Wilbur is not the thief!" and there, within the first half hour, a little incident had occurred that went far to prove all her confidence in the accused man's innocence misplaced.

Standing in the midst of the young men, and evidently a boon companion with them, was Henry Wilbur.

At a glance she saw that the young man was under the influence of wine, a bad omen where innocence is looked for.

She recognized him as the original of the photograph she carried.

"Heavens!" she murmured under her veil, as she hurried by, "my confidence was misplaced; the company he is in would proclaim his guilt; and yet how handsome he is," she added.

Kate had just passed the young men, and was hurrying on, when she heard one of them exclaim:

"By heavens! boys, there goes a woman fair with her *visor down!* I am going to rudely rend that veil aside, and gaze upon the lovely face it must conceal!"

Kate did not tremble; she did not fear the rending aside of her veil; she was perfectly ready to deal with a whole squad of audacious young scamps.

She still kept upon her way, however, and had proceeded but a few steps, when she became aware that she was being followed.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE OLD WOMAN.

THE lady detective turned her head, and a smile crossed her face as she discovered that the young man who had so rashly volunteered to rend aside her veil was Henry Wilbur.

At once she resolved to play the fearful young miss, and increased her pace, as though greatly alarmed, although, in reality, the young man had undertaken to accomplish just what she wished.

Immediately upon finding that she was being followed, she turned down the first side street.

She had not gone far, when she heard rapid but unsteady steps following close behind her.

She increased her speed, and had traversed one block, when she heard her pursuer mutter:

"By thunder! that veiled angel is traveling as fast as a gazelle!"

Again Kate made a turn, and passed up a street where they were most unlikely to meet with pedestrians.

The man started upon a run, reached her side, and placed his hand upon her shoulder.

The lady detective did not scream, but, coming to a halt, asked in a stern voice:

"What do you want, sir?"

"I want just one glimpse at your face, my sweet angel, and then you shall go upon your way rejoicing."

"What right have you to address me?"

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Henry Wilbur; and he boldly reached forth his hand to tear aside her veil.

Kate Goelet stepped back, raised her hand, and said:

"Be careful, sir! What do you want to see my face for?"

"Well, I have an idea that it must be very beautiful."

"And you have made a wager with some of your companions that you will find out, eh?"

"Not exactly; but I'm bound to see it, nevertheless!"

"What is your name, young man?"

"Well, you are turning the tables on me!"

"What is your name?"

"They call me Tom Paine."

"And you want to see my face?"

"I do."

"Have you any money?"

"I have plenty of it."

"Well, hire a carriage and go home; it's late for a boy of your age to be out."

"Now I swear I'll see your face!" And as the young man spoke he sprung forward and sought to seize hold of Kate.

Her veil was torn aside and her lovely face revealed.

"I beg pardon!" exclaimed the man.

It was evident he had expected to behold the face of some brazen creature, and when he beheld the countenance of a lady, and a beautiful one at that, a feeling of shame came over him.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the lady detective who could have prevented him from tearing aside her veil if she had wished.

Again the young man said:

"I beg your pardon!"

The lady detective drew back her veil, and turned to go home, when the young man, who had thus grossly insulted her, said:

"On my honor, I will escort you in safety to your home if you will permit."

"I certainly ought to feel safe under your protection after your rudeness."

"Let me atone for my rudeness."

"No, no; I need no escort," said Kate, and she resumed her way.

The man at first appeared inclined to follow her, but a second thought restrained him.

The next morning Kate Goelet, in the disguise of an old woman, issued from her lodgings.

She felt assured that, after all, it was possible that Henry Wilbur might be innocent, despite the fact that she had seen him in such questionable company.

He had shown that he had the instincts of a gentleman, even during the adventure of the previous night; as the moment he discovered that she was not what he had first supposed, he had ceased to molest her, and had apologized for his first rudeness.

The private banking-house of Attry, Comstock & Co., had been opened for several hours, and business had been proceeding in the ordinary manner, when an old lady, dressed in the most grotesque manner and looking exactly like some old farmer's wife, came bustling into the counting-room.

In a loud, screechy sort of voice she exclaimed:

"Is this Attry, Comstock & Co.'s money-house?"

The porter, who was standing near, answered:

"This is the banking-house of Attry, Comstock & Co., old lady."

"Indeed! And who be you?" asked the old woman, glancing through her spectacles at the porter.

"I am connected with this house."

"Oh, you are, eh? A cousin, I suppose? Well, I thought they were Americans: but if you are connected with them, they must be furriners, arter all!"

The old lady spoke in such a loud tone that all the clerks overheard the singular conversation, and a suppressed laugh followed the funny dialogue.

"Who do you wish to see, old woman?" asked the porter.

"Old woman, eh! Well, you are werry perlite, if you are a connection of the firm."

"Well, madame, who do you wish to see?"

"One of the firm."

"What is your business?"

"I reckon I'll tell my business to the one I want to see."

"Do you wish to see Mr. Attry or Mr. Comstock?"

"Either one of 'em will do."

"What shall I say your business is?"

"Well, may be I want to borrer some money to raise a mortgage."

The porter passed into the private office of the firm, and after a few moments returned and said:

"The members of the firm are both busy; you will have to come some other time, Mrs. —— what's your name?"

"My name is Rebecca Brown. I am from the Forge, Greene County, New York State; and I've come a long distance to see one of this 'ere firm, and I ain't going away until I see 'em!"

"You will have to come again."

"I will, eh?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well, I guess not; I ain't comin' trudging way down here to be put off in that way. You just go and tell the gentlemen my name, and let 'em know my business is important, and that I must see 'em right off the reel, will you?"

The porter was considerably put about. He did not exactly know what to do under the circumstances.

Again he entered the private office, and once more came forth and said that the members of the firm were all too busy to see her at that time.

"Well, now, I've jest got a letter of introduction to this 'ere firm from the bank up our way, and if you will just take it in, I reckon they'll conclude to see Rebecca Brown this morning, although she hain't come down in a kerridge covered with silks and feathers."

The porter took the note, and handed it to Mr. Comstock, the second member of the firm. The banker glanced at the note, which read as follows:

"The bearer of this note, no matter under what guise she may present herself, must be seen at all times. If it is possible to accomplish your business, the party who bears this will succeed. YOUNG."

"Ah!" said Mr. Comstock, who was a shrewd man, "you say this is an old lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I suppose I must see her. Please show her in."

The old lady was ushered into the private banking-office.

As she entered she said:

"Well, one would think that you fellers were President and Vice President of the United States the way you make people hop around to get in to see you!"

"We have a great deal to do, Mrs. ——. I beg pardon, what's the name!"

"Well you have got a bad memory, when your relative there just told you what my name was. My name is Rebecca Brown.

"Well, Mrs. Brown, what can I do for you?"

"You have a mortgage on our farm?"

"I beg pardon!" exclaimed Mr. Comstock, for the moment forgetting, when he was recalled to himself by a little gesture conveyed to him unobserved by any one else.

"Come to think, I believe one of our customers has deposited a mortgage with us."

"Well, I've just come down to see about that 'ere mortgage."

The banker had got his cue, and fell into the conversation with the strange woman.

All the time the talk was going on, the old lady was glancing from behind her spectacles at different objects around the room.

She was seated in such a position that she could see the clerks in the outer office, and, at the same time, she could catch just a glimpse of a man, seated at a desk in an office adjoining the one occupied by Mr. Comstock.

While carrying on her talk she fidgeted around, pretending to be very uneasy, but a keen observer would have noticed that she appeared to be very desirous of watching the face of the man in the inner office.

After awhile she lowered her voice, although still talking business concerning a supposed mortgage on a farm.

Suddenly she slipped a paper before Mr. Comstock, on which was written the question: "Who is the man in the next office?"

The banker wrote upon the card: "Our junior partner, Mr. Cameron."

There was a looking-glass in the room, and, going to it, the old lady said:

"Well, I declare! traveling in them boats has made me look quite a fright!"

While pretending to look at her strange face in the glass, and while still talking, the old lady placed the glass in such a position that she could watch the movements of the man in the inner office while sitting with her back toward him.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TRAIL.

THE glass was skillfully adjusted by a practical and cunning hand.

Still talking about her appearance, the old lady resumed her seat and watched the man in the adjoining room.

He had clean-cut, shrewd features. Once or twice he turned his head, so that the old woman got a full view of his whole face.

Mr. Cameron, to an ordinary observer, was a very ordinary-looking man; but a pair of keen eyes, hidden behind a pair of blue-glass spectacles, read other indices in his face, although only rewarded with an occasional glimpse of his features.

There this observer read cruelty and cunning, deceit and avariciousness.

The same observer saw that she was gazing upon a man

capable of assuming the rôle of a very virtuous person while acting the part of a rascal.

The old lady seemingly had about completed her business with Mr. Comstock, and rose to go.

The banker whispered to her:

"What hope have you?"

"I will recover the bonds!"

"You really think so?"

"I will not fail; I know I will recover them."

"You knew who the suspected man was before you came here?"

"Yes."

Mr. Comstock said:

"Come this way, Mrs. Brown and I will see if your recollection of the date of the last payment on the mortgage is correct."

The banker led the old lady into a small side office, and closed the door behind him.

"You are the detective?" he said.

"I am."

"Excuse me, but am I addressing a man or a woman?"

The old woman smiled behind her specs as she answered:

"Don't I look like a woman?"

"Yes; but you know we can never tell about detectives."

"Neither will I tell you any more than is necessary."

"You feel confident of recovering the stolen property?"

"I do."

"Do you think we have taken the right course in tracing the bonds before letting our loss be known?"

"I do."

"You know you will have to follow Mr. Wilbur closer than he has ever been followed, as he is a most cunning rascal, and has covered his tracks so well that it will be hard to run him to his lair—or rather the woman's lair."

"Why do you think there is a woman in the case?"

"Did not the chief give you all the facts?"

"He claimed to have done so."

"Well, then, you know why we are sure there is a woman at the bottom of the robbery."

"I do not believe a woman has had anything to do with it."

"You astonish me."

"I will astonish you still more within a few weeks."

"You have a theory?"

"I have."

"You do not appear to have more than glanced at Mr. Wilbur."

"I have taken a good many glances, more than you think," answered the detective, in a significant tone.

The old woman and the banker came from the office again, talking about that imaginary mortgage in the most business-like manner.

As they came out, an elegantly dressed woman of about thirty entered the office and passed through to the room where Mr. Cameron was seated.

"Who is that woman?" asked the lady detective.

"A cousin of our partner, Mr. Cameron," answered Mr. Comstock, in a tone calculated to imply, "Oh, she is all right; she has had nothing to do with the thief, Wilbur."

The old lady bundled together her traps and prepared to leave the office. As she reached the door, she said, in a loud tone:

"I am going to stay a few days in the city, and will drop in again, when possibly we may come to some settlement about that ere mortgage!"

Once in the outer office, she took a good look at Henry Wilbur.

He was dressed entirely different from what he had been the previous night, and looked very little like a man who had been upon an all night's spree.

Besides, he looked so frank and handsome, that it appeared astonishing that any one could ever have suspected him of being a thief.

The old woman passed from the bank, and, when once without, murmured:

"There is some strange mystery there; that young man is an extraordinary individual, or else one of the most accomplished scoundrels in the States. How innocent he looks," she added, "compared to his appearance last night when he was determined to catch a view of my face. What a demure puss he is just now!"

The old lady stopped at a pie-stand and bought some cakes and managed to linger around for some time.

In fact, an hour passed, when the lady who had gone in to see Mr. Cameron, the junior member of the firm, came forth.

The old woman hobbled after the elegantly dressed lady, muttering to herself, "There may be a woman in the case, after all!"

Henry Wilbur had entered the banking-house in which he was employed at the time our story opens when but a boy.

He was the son of a widow, came of a good family, but had no means save what he earned at the banking-house, just sufficient to support himself and his mother comfortably.

On the evening of the same day that the strange-looking old woman had visited the banking-house, Henry returned to his home—a modest two story building situated in the outskirts of Brooklyn.

He looked calm and serene when at the banking-office, and very little like one who was the bearer of some terrible secret—like a man who had stolen one million dollars.

Once away from the bank, however, and a look of keen anxiety came over his handsome face.

He looked like one who had suddenly, through some mysterious influence, grown old in looks, while still young in years.

Upon reaching home, his mother met him at the door.

The latter was a handsome woman, and it was evident that all her hope in life lay in her handsome son.

A mother's eye had long ago detected that her son was the bearer of some secret sorrow or care.

Upon the afternoon in question he looked more careworn than usual.

Heretofore his mother had forborne to speak to him, hoping that in due time the cause of his trouble would pass away, or that he would conclude to take her into his confidence.

Upon the evening in question she determined to speak to him.

"Henry," she said, as he entered the sitting-room and threw himself upon a lounge with a weary sigh, "what is it that troubles you?"

"Nothing, mother."

"Are you sick?"

"No."

"Then certainly you have something on your mind. Why have a secret from me?"

"You are mistaken, mother. We are very busy over at the office, and I get very tired lately."

Mrs. Wilbur glanced at the large form and muscular limbs of her handsome son, and a look of incredulity came over her face at the idea of that strong, handsome man becoming tired.

"Henry, you can not deceive a mother's love. I have watched you closely lately. Whatever your trouble is, confide in me."

"Oh, mother!" burst out the young man, involuntarily, "I can not tell you my trouble!"

"Ah! then there is a trouble, Henry?"

"Mother, you have forced me to so much of an admission."

"Having admitted so much, my son, tell me all."

As the mother spoke she went and folded her son's head in her arms, kissed and caressed him as she had when but a boy that she could clasp upon her lap.

The strong man could stand no more.

His great broad chest began to heave, and an instant later a sob burst from his lips.

A mother's love had pierced the steel casing that hid the secret, and at last Henry Wilbur had determined to disclose his fearful tale.

CHAPTER IV.

PIPING DOWN FOR FACTS.

THE words were upon his lips, but he caught a glimpse of a look of expectant agony upon his beautiful mother's face, when down fell the gates over the coming flow of disclosure, and he was silent.

"My son, my son, you must unburden your heart to me!"

"Mother, you shall know the truth!" exclaimed Henry. "I have borne the tortures of hell for the last three months!"

"I have suspected as much, my dear boy; and now tell me all!"

"Business is bad in our office. I have long known that there were more clerks than needed; some must be discharged; the junior partner is prejudiced against me; lately he has shown his dislike more and more. When the discharge takes place I will be the first to go."

Henry Wilbur had told the truth, but, alas! not all the truth.

His mother believed it to be all the truth, and considered the disclosure sufficient to account for her son's evident long mental distress.

The news was bad, but, being so far less distressing than what she had expected, she breathed a sigh of relief; a smile broke over her face, and in a cheerful and reassuring voice, she exclaimed:

"Well, my son, is that all the bad news you have for me? and has such a commonplace incident been the cause of all your late anxiety?"

"Yes, mother."

"You can be happy, then, for it is not worth all the misery you have caused yourself."

"But, mother, what shall we do? I have saved nothing from my small salary."

Over the mantel in the parlor was hung one of those fancy needle-worked mottoes, "The Lord will provide."

Mrs. Wilbur pointed to the scriptural legend, and said, cheerfully:

"My son, there is truth in that promise. Do your duty, sin not, and go forth boldly, and all will be well in the end."

Until lately Henry Wilbur had always been regular in his habits, home early, cheerful and kind in his demeanor, and in every way had shown the possession of a contented mind.

Just previous, however, to the scene above described, a complete change had come over him.

He had remained out late at night; he had risen in the morning, after a short sleep, moody and cross.

His mother upon two occasions had thought she had detected signs of liquor upon him, and she had feared in her heart that when the truth became known some terrible disclosure would be made.

When her son told her his trouble, it made her comparatively happy, since she had dreaded admissions much more fateful.

Upon the following morning Henry told his mother that he would not be home that night until very late.

At the front door he kissed her good-bye, and seemingly was more cheerful than he had been for months.

Little did that fond and loving mother dream that at the moment he kissed her good-bye, he carried a loaded revolver in his pocket, ready, upon certain contingencies, to blow his brains out.

Henry Wilbur had a secret on his conscience yet untold, and, although he appeared calm and cheerful, a fearful tumult was raging in his mind.

He went to the corner of the street, hailed a passing car, and took passage to the ferry.

At the corner below where he had entered the car, it stopped again, and a lady entered.

The latter was a strange-looking person.

She had lovely blue eyes, but, singularly enough, a very dark complexion, a contrast seldom seen in womanhood.

She was exceedingly handsome, however, and, despite the sorrow at his heart, our hero could not avoid an occasional glance over his paper at her.

At length an undefined impression crept over him that he had seen her before somewhere; yet, rack his memory as he might, he could not recall when and where.

Owing to the peculiarity of her appearance, it struck him that if he had once seen her he must certainly identify her, and at length concluded that he must be mistaken.

He reached the ferry, passed upon the boat, and seated himself in the cabin, where, upon raising his eyes, after a moment, he saw that strangely beautiful woman sitting directly opposite to him; and it was not long before he discovered, also, that he was the subject of her observation.

He left the boat and proceeded to his office; and as he passed through the door-way leading to the banking-house, he saw the same strange lady passing along on the opposite side of the street.

"Hang that pretty creature! I wonder if I have ever seen her before?"

Then a certain thought appeared to flash over his mind, a pallor overspread his face, and in a low, terrified tone, he muttered:

"Heavens! can it be possible that I am being spotted?"

As the suspicion flashed through his mind instinctively his hand rested on the spot over the pocket where the loaded pistol lay concealed, ready at any moment for its deadly suicidal purpose.

Henry Wilbur was not deceived by his memory.

The lady who sat opposite to him in the cars and ferry-boat, and who passed on the opposite side of the street when he entered his office, was Kate Goelet, the lady detective.

She had seen him when he parted from his mother; she had overheard even their parting words; and she had been "shadowing" him as surely as though she believed in his guilt.

Had she overheard what had passed between the young man and his mother the previous evening, she might have been somewhat staggered in her belief in his innocence.

The mere fear of a discharge from a situation does not usually lead a young man to meditate a violent death at his own hands.

Henry Wilbur was the victim of conscious guilt.

Every sense of suspicion was on the alert, every movement of every clerk and each member of the firm was watched with cat-like patience.

Any moment he feared a terrible discovery and an awful scene—ay, a tragedy!

He was living a life that can only be termed a "living hell." Conscience-seared, he stood day after day at his desk, and, being naturally a keen, nervous, observant man, his suspicions were aroused at the slightest incident.

In fact he led what may be termed a suspected life. He felt that his crime was known, and that the members of the firm were only waiting a fitting moment to brand him as a thief.

He felt that he was being shadowed. And when he met the strange-looking woman upon the car and ferry, and saw her pass his office, he at once, with guilty terror, conceived that he was being "piped" by one of those terrible scourges to the guilty—a detective.

The fact that the "shadow" appeared in the form of a woman was no relief to him. He knew that there were skillful detectives who could assume the guise of womanhood; and, besides, he knew that when necessity required, there was a corps of lady detectives on hand to "pipe" and prepare the way for more able-bodied officers.

During the course of the day Henry Wilbur was standing unintentionally close to the partition that separated the private offices of the firm from the main office.

His quick ear detected a conversation between the junior member of the firm and the second partner.

The words caused his blood to run cold and his heart to stand still.

It was the junior member of the firm, Mr. Cameron, who spoke, and his words carried an awful suggestion.

"What has been done regarding Mr. Wilbur?" was the question.

"The matter is in progress," answered Mr. Comstock.

"I fear you are making a mistake," said Cameron, in a cold tone.

"How?"

"Your bird will take flight."

"No, sir; he does not dream that he has been discovered, or even suspected."

"He is a cunning and deep rascal; I have been watching him closely, lately; he suspects more than you have any idea of, and you will learn, when too late, that I am right."

"The matter, Mr. Cameron, is in skillful hands, and in a few days Mr. Wilbur will be in jail, from whence he can not escape."

Had any of the other clerks observed the expression upon Henry Wilbur's face, as he staggered across that counting-room, they would have thought that a ghost was walking in their midst.

Henry Wilbur, however, was a man of iron nerve.

Within a few moments a desperate purpose had entered his heart.

His resolution caused him to become perfectly calm.

The color returned to his cheeks and the brightness to his eyes, and he went about his duties as calmly as though it were not to be his last day on earth.

How little did that young man dream how, having plot-

ted against himself, a higher fate had ordained that out of his contemplated death should blossom life! That same night told a thrilling tale.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE BRINK OF PERIL.

HENRY remained at his office until the hour came for the bank to close.

Not a soul of all those with whom he exchanged the friendly good-night dreamed of the fearful purpose that he had formed.

He went to a restaurant, sat down, and partook of a hearty dinner.

Opposite to him sat a young, boyish-looking man.

Henry was so absorbed in his own dark thoughts that he failed to notice a pair of handsome blue eyes fastened upon him.

The young man thought that all his dark purposes were concealed in his own brain; but, strangely enough, a magnetic nature sitting near him, by some weird influence, had half read his purpose upon his calm brow.

Not the details of all his plan, but enough to create a desire to watch him.

Henry eat, drank, and left the restaurant, proceeding up town to a billiard-room.

Had he noticed the young man in the restaurant, he would have been startled to see him in the billiard-room; but not having noticed the "shadow" in the first instance, his attention was not attracted in the second.

Night fell, and Henry Wilbur came forth and sauntered down Broadway.

It was after ten o'clock.

He strolled into Union Square Park.

Throwing himself upon a rustic seat, he removed his hat, and a long-drawn sigh fell from his lips.

He looked around him, and seemed to be alone.

He did not observe a lithe, graceful form stretched upon the grass along the shadow of the trunk of a giant tree.

His overcharged heart could not restrain the audible words that struggled to his lips.

"Heavens!" he muttered, "what a hell is my life, and what a hell am I preparing for my poor mother! Oh! my God!" he sobbed, "my mother, my poor, poor mother! but it will be better, ay, far better. For sorrow must come! Did I do different, it would be the longer drawn out; now, one agony, one sharp scream of terrible misery, and then God will send her peace! But were it otherwise, alas! the disgrace would cling forever."

A moment the young man sat silent, then again he spoke. The second time his voice was hard and resolute—the tenderness and pathos had vanished.

"It is the cast of the last die," he said. "I have played a deep game; I must play it once more—to win or to lose! If I lose, all is lost! And then—well, well, no danger—I'll not fail myself."

Henry Wilbur rose from his seat, clapped his hat upon his head, and walked toward the north-west exit from the park.

His shadow still close behind him.

Every word that he had uttered was overheard by a pair of sharp ears, and the heart that responded to the knowledge was sad and heavy.

Kate Goelet had experienced strange emotions since first her eyes had rested upon the handsome face of Henry Wilbur.

The latter was beyond question one of the handsomest men in New York.

He combined great beauty with that appearance of decisive manliness which has such a charm for the female heart.

Henry had drunk considerable, both in the restaurant and during the time he had been in the billiard-room.

At length he stopped in front of a famous gambling "hell."

Once he passed up the stoop of the brown-stone gambling-palace, his hand was upon the bell knob, but it was withdrawn, and he descended the stoop.

At the bottom he met a slender-framed young man.

The latter addressed him, and his words showed that he had been a witness of Henry's movements.

"Young man, follow the good impulse: do not enter that place."

Harry was excited with wine, and asked, in a harsh, fierce voice:

"Who the devil are you?"

"A stranger who would urge you to refrain from entering that place."

"What do you know about that place?"

"I've been there."

"Oh! you have? Well, there's one place it's evident you have not been."

"Where is that?"

"Where you were taught to mind your own business," was the savage retort.

"I have intended no offense."

"And you will give none if you go on about your business."

"One word, young man, remember your mother."

Henry Wilbur was half crazed; in his state of mind, filled with the terrible purpose he had determined upon, he did not stop to consider right nor wrong, nor motive, good or bad.

The stranger's words stung him, and at the moment sounded to his ears as a sort of taunt; his great, strong arm was upraised quickly and the well-advising stranger went reeling into the street.

Up the stoop Henry leaped, and rang the bell.

The rude act he had just performed appeared to have excited all the demon in his nature.

The violence of his passion appeared an instant later to have subsided, and he realized that his conduct had been very brutal.

His naturally good heart caused him to regret his ill-judged temper, and, running down the steps, he advanced to assist his victim to his feet.

His services were not needed, however, as the stranger leaped to his feet without assistance.

Again Henry returned to the gambling-saloon, and, without further ado, passed the fatal portals.

He had determined to take his last chance—to cast the last die—and, in case of failure, resort to that last refuge so often sought by maddened and desperate men.

In the meantime, the victim of Henry's brutal rudeness had risen to his feet, and, as he rubbed the side of his head, muttered:

"My lucky face!—had that blow taken me squarely, the long-dreaded catastrophe would have come, and I should have been doomed to be a thief-taker all my life."

Thus muttering, the stranger passed up the street, when a most singular transformation scene occurred.

The light wig was removed, and one as black as a raven's wing substituted. A mustache suddenly appeared where the lip had been smooth; as quickly and as completely a change of dress followed, and the puny-faced little gent of the restaurant and billiard-room was transformed into quite a dashing-looking man of very Frenchified appearance.

It was evident that the transformed eccentricity had not been discouraged by the treatment he had received.

He advanced to the gambling-saloon, rang the bell, and was admitted.

What passed beneath that roof it is not for us to record.

The strange being who had been watching every movement of Henry Wilbur, remained at his side like a shadow until, in a fit of desperation, the young man, after having cast the last die and lost, hastened from the place.

The stranger, on the alert, followed, and was close upon the young man's track ready to intervene in case some rash deed were attempted.

Once in the street Henry passed toward the river.

With noiseless step the stranger followed.

Straight toward the river glided the pursued and the pursuer.

As though the desperate youth's purpose had been revealed to him, the stranger appeared to understand it.

The river was reached.

The night was dark and Henry seemed hardly to know for a moment what course to take.

At length, after waiting the passage of a policeman, he stole across the street and started out toward the end of the pier.

The stranger followed, uttering no cry for help nor signal for assistance.

At the extreme end of the pier he saw Henry mounted upon the string-piece—one plunge and he would be in the river.

With a noiseless tread, and as swiftly as the tiger springs upon his prey, the stranger leaped forward.

With a savage cry, Henry turned upon the man whose meddling hand had averted the wild, mad act.

The young man evidently had run stark mad.

"Fiend!" he hissed, "you would save me, and, by the gods! now shall you go first, and then I'll follow you!"

He caught the light form of the stranger in his firm grasp, and madly he rushed toward the string-piece.

The latter was but a feather in his clutch.

"Henry Wilbur, what would you do?"

The young man stopped; he set the stranger upon his feet. Reason for a moment appeared to have returned.

The mention of his name seemed to recall him to reason.

"You know me?" he said.

"I do."

"Who are you?"

"You would not know me."

"Ah, ha!" almost screamed the young man, as a fit of madness appeared once more to come upon him; "I see: you have been tracking me! Ha, ha! you would save me only to hand me over to the law! No, no! you have put yourself in the clutches of the lion! By heavens! nothing shall save you! Together we will take the mad leap! You shall not escape! In my grasp I'll hold you beneath the waters! Come, quick—say a prayer!"

"My only prayer, Henry Wilbur, is for you. Calm yourself; consider what you are doing."

"No, no! the hour for consideration on my part has passed. I did not bid you follow me. No living person must know my fate! You should not have followed me—you have come to your doom!"

"You must listen to me. Remember your mother!"

"Now, surely you shall die!" and with the glare of madness blazing in his eyes, Henry seized the stranger in his arms.

He had rushed toward the string-piece A moment and all would have been over.

"Mercy!" pleaded the stranger.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the madman.

"Mercy!" again pleaded the stranger.

"You die!"

"Spare me—I am a woman!"

Henry Wilbur stepped back. Once more he stood the stranger down, and said, now in perfectly calm and reasonable tones:

"You are a woman?"

"Yes."

"What brought you here?"

"To save you."

"To save me?"

"Yes."

"What interest have you in me?"

"I can not tell you now, even to save my life."

"A woman! I can not take revenge upon a woman! my mother is a woman! But one thing you must promise me, woman."

"I will promise you anything."

"I spare you on one condition."

"Name it."

"The waters call for me; I go to them. On your knees swear that you will never disclose the fate of Henry Wilbur."

"Are you still determined to die?"

"I am."

"Then I die with you. My promise shall be kept in that way."

Henry was astounded. Had one of the firm come to him at that moment and told him all was right, he could not have been more astonished.

A moment he stood silent and irresolute, when his companion advanced and laid her hand upon his arm.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LADY DETECTIVE AS A SAVING ANGEL.

"HENRY WILBUR," said the party who had so strangely proclaimed herself a woman, "there is no need for you to destroy yourself. I know your secret!"

"You know my secret?"

"Yes."

"To what secret do you allude?"

"The secret that has caused you to seek to take your own life."

"If you speak truly, woman, you must know that you can not save me."

"I know that I can!"

"How came you to be the possessor of my secret?"

"At some future time I will tell you; but now let it suffice that I will prove your innocence."

"Prove my innocence?"

"Yes."

"Pray, woman, who are you?"

"It matters not; I would save not only your life, but your honor."

"You are certainly a mysterious person: pray how came you to be interested in my affairs?"

"That too shall be explained at some future time; but now promise me to be a man, and come away from that horrid water! Ugh! it makes me shudder—the thought of what might have occurred."

"If you are a female, why are you dressed in male attire?"

"You must wait for an explanation of that also."

"And you say you will prove me innocent?"

"I will."

"Then you do not know my secret."

At that moment a step was heard walking toward them along the pier.

Both turned, and two officers—ordinary policemen in full uniform—approached.

"What are you two doing on this pier at this hour?" came the question.

"We are just going home," answered Kate Goelet.

"I reckon it's to the station-house you will go and give an account of yourselves."

Henry Wilbur felt very blue just at that moment, and in his heart cursed the luck that had brought that mysterious *woman*, as she called herself, to interfere with him.

He knew what New York policemen were, and expected, as a matter of course, they would both be taken to the station.

Another idea flashed over his mind.

If his companion was really a woman, was not her sex likely to be discovered? and then what a nice position he would be in!

He was saved from any such dilemma, however, in a most extraordinary manner.

The woman advanced to the policemen, whispered a few words to them, and both departed as quietly as though the command had come from the chief of police.

"Now come with me," said our hero's companion.

The curiosity of the latter was aroused, and he concluded to follow her.

It was certainly a most extraordinary adventure, and had given, for the time being, a more normal turn to the drift of his thoughts.

The lady detective had formed a desperate resolution, and she was determined to carry it out that very night.

Disguised as she was, she was known at a certain public-house as the little Frenchman, and no one in the hotel had ever suspected or questioned her sex.

It chanced that the house in question was but twenty minutes' walk from the pier where a terrible tragedy had almost occurred.

Henry Wilbur followed the strange party at his side, determined to see the adventure through without asking any questions.

His companion did not appear disposed to talk, and they walked along in silence.

At length they arrived in front of a hotel, which Henry recognized as a great resort for sporting characters.

"We will enter here," said his strange companion.

A suspicion flashed over Henry's mind, and he was constrained to exclaim:

"Hold on! What is your purpose in entering this place?"

"I must see you alone."

"Do you know the character of this place?"

"I do; it is the resort of sporting men and 'knucks.'"

"And you, a woman, would enter such a place?"

"Oh, I am a man now, you know; and I know of no other place where we can gain entrance at this hour."

"All right; if you are not afraid, I do not know why I should be," answered Henry.

"I am not afraid. Come along: no one will have anything to say to us."

The lady detective had spent many an hour in that same house, laying for points for male detectives, and so cunningly had she performed her part that her real purpose had never been suspected.

Followed by Henry Wilbur, she passed through the bar-room, which was occupied by quite a number of hard-looking men.

With some she exchanged greetings, and others she passed with merely a nod.

Henry followed his strange conductress out into a lighted hallway, up a pair of stairs, and along a second hall, until she stopped in front of a door on which was a number.

She placed her hand upon the knob as though to enter, when a certain recollection flashed over Henry's mind.

"Is it best for me to enter that room?" he asked.

"Desperate cases require desperate remedies. I must have a few words with you; one place is as fitting as another!" and with an impatient gesture the lady detective turned the knob, pushed the door open, and entered the room.

Without further dissent, Henry followed.

There was no furniture in the room, save a table and two chairs.

Our hero's companion pointed to a chair, and said: "Sit down!"

The light from the hall illuminated the room; but the strange woman struck a match, lit the gas, and pushed to the door, when she seated herself in the other chair directly opposite Henry.

Fixing her eyes upon him, she asked, sharply:

"What led you to attempt to take your life to-night?"

"You said you knew my secret."

"I do."

"Then you know why I attempted to take my life."

"But why should you seek to take your life, when you are really innocent; why should the innocent fear?"

"I thought you knew my secret?"

"I do, I repeat."

"Then you must know that I am not innocent."

The lady detective gave a start, and a frightened look overspread her face, as she exclaimed, interrogatively:

"You are not innocent?"

"See here, strange woman, who are you? and what interest have you in my fate?"

"There is no reason why I should not tell you. I am a detective. I have been 'piping' you for some days. I am employed to recover the bonds that were stolen from the firm of Attry, Comstock & Co."

"The bonds stolen from Attry, Comstock & Co.?"

"Yes."

"Great heavens! has a robbery been committed on that firm?"

"Yes."

"Strange I should know nothing about it," exclaimed the young man, in the most innocent manner possible.

A smile played over the lady detective's face.

The keen eyes had been fixed upon her companion, and she knew now that her first confidence was not misplaced, but at the same time another suspicion flashed over her mind.

"Yes," she said, "bonds to the value of one million dollars were stolen from the safe of the firm you serve, and you have been dogged and 'piped' for weeks as the thief."

"Great heavens! can this be true?"

"It is true; and now let me tell you that I know you are a defaulter, but you did not steal those bonds."

Henry Wilbur gazed in amazement, but at length he said:

"Tell me all about this matter."

"No, no; first tell me how you came to appropriate the firm's money, how you became a defaulter, and then you shall hear what I have to say."

Henry gazed like one dazed at the extraordinary being sitting opposite him. He could hardly realize but what he was the victim of some strange delusion.

"Come," said his companion, "I am your friend! You will find me your rescuer: and you shall know in time why I have made your cause mine."

Henry Wilbur was a strong-nerved, self-willed man, and yet he was strangely under the influence of the magnetic little creature who sat opposite to him with her keen blue eyes fixed upon his face.

Again, in an impatient tone, Kate Goelet said:

"Come, come, tell me how you came to fall! Tell me the whole truth. You shall be saved, your honor saved; but tell me the whole truth."

After a moment's hesitation, Henry Wilbur said:

"It's the old, old story!"

"Well, let me hear the old, old story, and it may prove your salvation—yours and your mother's!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

THE allusion to our hero's mother touched a chord that no other appeal could have reached, and he said:

"A dear friend of mine came to me one day in dire distress, and wanted the loan of two hundred and fifty dollars. I did not have the money, and told him so."

"Ah! I see it is the old, old story," commented our hero's companion.

"My friend was engaged to be married; I knew well the lady, and I loved both of them as I would have loved a brother and sister, if I had had them."

"You yielded to your friend by lending what did not belong to you."

"Listen! I did not yield until he assured me that he only wanted the money for twenty-four hours. He told me that he needed it to save both life and honor. I knew that I had money in my possession that I could use without its loss being missed for weeks, if necessary, and, after much persuasion, I did yield, and let my friend have the money fully believing that within twenty-four hours I could return it from whence I took it."

"Your friend failed you?"

"He did; before twenty-four hours had passed my friend was dead. The money had come too late to save him, and he shot himself!"

"Then you are a defaulter to the amount of two hundred and fifty dollars?"

"Oh! would that it were only two hundred and fifty dollars!" moaned Henry.

"How much do you owe the firm?"

"Nearly three thousand dollars."

"How came the amount so large, when the original amount was only two hundred and fifty?"

"A week passed after my friend's death: my salary was already overdrawn, and I was almost frantic, fearing discovery."

"Go on; tell me all!"

"I had never been in the habit of staying out late nights, but I was too restless to remain home, and I wandered out nights; one night, with a chance acquaintance, I entered a faro-room."

"Ah! go on, I see," muttered the lady detective.

"I saw men winning large sums of money; in a few seconds a mad thought seized me. I thought that I might win enough to restore the money I had appropriated."

"Yes, yes, the same old, old story!" muttered the lady detective, meditatively.

"You know what followed. I need not say more. I lost, and lost, and lost; to-night you saw me make my last venture; again I was the loser, and then madly I resolved to die!"

"And I saved you!"

"You saved me from death, but can you save me from disgrace?"

"I can."

"Again, who are you?"

"Oh! my story is a commonplace one. I am but a plain woman, compelled like many other women to earn her own living, and I became an aid to a detective; there are some things in our profession that a woman can better perform than a man; you know all the great thieves are not men?"

Henry felt constrained to say:

"You must run great risk in your profession; you are weak in body, and you may be killed."

"Oh! I can take care of myself!" answered Kate Goelet, in a confident tone.

"How could you have taken care of yourself to-night, when I caught you in my arms and was rushing with you toward the docks?"

"Ah! had you been a thief with whom I was struggling, and had it been only a question of saving my own life, I could have freed myself in an instant!"

"What, from me?"

"Yes."

"Pray, teach me how?"

The disguised woman raised her hands, and by some secret movement that Henry could not detect, she touched a spring that caused two slender stilettos, fully six inches in length, to shoot out from under her sleeve.

In a quaint, determined manner she said:

"I could have sent this through your heart. I do not fear men when they are foes, and bad."

"I would like to see you when not in disguise!" exclaimed Henry, involuntarily.

"I do not suppose you ever will. But now listen"—and the lady detective proceeded, and told our hero all about the stolen bonds; how he was suspected as the thief; and it was believed that there was a woman in the case, the latter fact leading to her own employment in tracing the stolen property.

Henry was amazed, and, in a reflective tone, said:

"This accounts for Mr. Cameron's strange watchfulness."

"Has Mr. Cameron watched you lately?"

"He has. And I have always suspected that he knew of my defalcation. I knew nothing of the stolen bonds."

The lady detective was silent and thoughtful for a few moments; but at length, in a business-like tone, she asked:

"Henry Wilbur, are you a man of nerve?"

"Well, I used to think I was, but my nerve appears to have failed me lately."

"If the money you have used from the bank were restored, do you think you could, as an innocent man, go through a very trying ordeal for a good purpose and a rich reward?"

"I do not understand you."

The lady detective repeated her words.

"As an innocent man I could go through anything!"

"Could you stand to appear guilty for awhile, knowing that in the end your innocence would be established?"

"I could!"

"If you can, you and I together can run down the real robber of the million dollars in bonds!"

"Then you suspect some one?"

"I do."

"Who?"

"In our business we make no confidants until our work is accomplished; it is enough for you to know that the real robber has skillfully cast a most damning net-work of circumstantial evidence about you: and, although I am but a woman, I do say, had I not come into the case, you would have been convicted as the thief!"

"No; I would have been lying at the bottom of the Hudson!"

"Your memory would have been damned! And your mother?"

"Oh, hush! do not mention my poor mother! I shudder when I think of the fearful calamity that came so near to her but for you!"

"Meet me to-morrow; go to the office—act as usual—meet me at noon, and you shall be a free, honest man once more!"

Henry Wilbur parted from the remarkable woman who had so strangely become mingled in his concerns.

The lady detective accompanied him to the door and parted from him.

As Henry walked down toward the ferry on his way to Brooklyn, his thoughts were strange indeed.

He was like one in a dream!

There were a thousand questions he would like to have put to the woman who had saved him against himself, but a sense of delicacy restrained him.

Some people are peculiarly and sensitively conscious to certain impressions.

Henry had sat directly opposite to that disguised woman, with her blue eyes fixed upon his, and at moments when she addressed him a certain expression beamed in her orbs, the memory of which caused a strange flutter at his heart.

His thoughts found utterance in mutterings. "Some raw-featured, homely, cunning woman, I suppose, smart as a steel trap; and yet those women are sometimes capable of an intense passion. Why should she be so interested in my fate? Toward what am I rushing, should she free me to-morrow? She can command my gratitude, but, by Heaven, what more may she expect?"

Henry Wilbur could not fail to recognize the importance and value, in one respect, of his personal advantages; and vanity and self-conceit are not confined altogether to the bosom of females.

Upon the following morning Henry was at his desk, when the same strange old woman, Rebecca Brown, called at the banking-office.

The porter announced her presence to Mr. Comstock, and she was admitted.

It chanced that upon the occasion of her second visit, Mr. Comstock was alone in the private offices.

The doors communicating with the outer offices were closed.

"Well?" exclaimed Mr. Comstock, interrogatively.

"It is well so far, and I have discovered that your original suspicions were correct, there is a woman in the case."

"Have you discovered her?"

"I think I have."

"Is she young?"

"No; not very."

"Who is she?"

"I can not tell until I get through, but of one thing be assured, the bonds are held intact, not one of them has been negotiated."

"You amaze me!"

"You will be still more amazed; but I have an order to present," and the lady detective handed the banker a written note.

The latter glanced at it, and assumed a thoughtful attitude.

The note was an order for three thousand dollars, an installment on the eventual reward; the chief, who was a man of large means, offered to consider the amount a loan if the bonds were not recovered.

After a moment's thought, in a very solemn manner, peculiar to moneyed men when giving out checks, Mr. Comstock said:

"This is all I shall advance."

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOSING IN ON CLEWS.

AT the appointed hour, Henry Wilbur was at the corner named for his appointment with the lady detective.

He was anxious and expectant, and was pacing the sidewalk in an abstracted manner, when a hand was suddenly laid upon his arm.

He looked up, and encountered the old woman who had been in the banking-house upon two occasions.

In a shrill voice, she exclaimed:

"Young man, you seem to be in a bad way! What's the matter? Have you a headache, or troubled with dyspepsia? 'Cause if you are, I kin jest recommend something that will do you a world of good."

Our hero was taken clean aback, and, in an impatient tone, answered:

"When I want medical advice, old lady, I'll let you know!"

"Well, now, I didn't mean no offense, only I saw you tramping up and down the sidewalk, and I thought you might be ailing. You should never git mad at people whose intentions are good!"

Henry regretted his impatient manner, and said:

"You must excuse me, old lady; I did not mean to be cross; but, really, there is nothing the matter with me, and I have no need for your good offices."

"Well, I have for yours. I am a stranger, and an old woman, and I want you to just come and show me where Exchange Place may be."

"On right down this street, cross two others and you are in Exchange Place."

"Come along and show me, may be my eyesight ain't good."

"I have not the time."

"Ah, you are ashamed to be seen walking with an old woman! Well, well, I'll go, and if I find it, not much thanks to you!"

Henry was really a noble-hearted fellow, and glancing at his watch, he saw that he was a little ahead of time, and he started in pursuit of the old lady, and upon overtaking her, said, in a kindly voice:

"I have a moment to spare. I will walk with you to Exchange Place, and hurry back to keep my appointment."

"Well, now, see here, young man, may be you can save me the trouble of going to Exchange Place?"

Henry stood aghast, but was a hundred times more astonished when the strange old lady went on, and said:

"I've just got three thousand dollars I want some one to carry to a young man named Henry Wilbur. You look like an honest young man, and may be you can just run down with it to him."

"Three thousand dollars for Henry Wilbur, did you say?"

"Exactly!"

"I am Henry Wilbur, old lady, but, upon my word, you astonish me!" And the same instant Henry recollected himself, and added: "Great Heaven! Am I talking with my benefactor of last night?"

A low laugh came from behind the green veil, and the words:

"You are."

"I would never have known you."

"Here is the money; make good your account. Be careful in doing so that you do not betray yourself in making restoration."

"Heaven bless you!" murmured Henry Wilbur, as tears of gratitude filled his eyes.

"Never mind about blessing me; it's all right. We must not be seen talking together. I may want your assistance in a day or two. Hold yourself in readiness"—and after the hurried words recorded, the old woman resumed her screechy way of speaking, and continued:

"Well, I'm much obliged to you, young man. I kin git along all right now, and when you git old and half blind, may ye find good friends to lead you right through the crowded city!"

An instant later, and Henry Wilbur was standing alone. The old lady had mysteriously disappeared in the crowd.

Our hero stood with the money in his hand; his salvation from disgrace, from punishment; ay, indeed, from death at his own hands! and he owed all to the mysterious and extraordinary creature who had so strangely become his friend.

The young man could hardly realize that he was not dreaming. It did not seem that the money was real, so wonderfully had it come into his possession.

He walked down a side street, and fastened his eyes upon it. It was there; he was awake; it was no dream, and he was saved!

He returned to the bank; an hour later, and his accounts were properly adjusted, and he could fix his handsome eyes upon any man living in their old-time fearless manner.

Extraordinary are the dealings of fate.

That same afternoon, Mr. Cameron came to Henry Wilbur, and said, in a cool, business-like manner, that he would go over certain accounts with him.

Mr. Cameron had once been book-keeper of the house, and had been promoted to junior partner.

He was an expert accountant.

The accounts that he demanded to go over would have exposed the defalcation.

Thanks to the angel who had come to our hero's rescue, he was able to say in a cheerful voice:

"Certainly, Mr. Cameron, my books are open for your inspection!"

A cold gleam shone in Mr. Cameron's eyes, and had one read his secret thoughts, the reading would have been:

"He thinks he has doctored those books. Well, well, see if I can be deceived."

The examination took place, and everything was found correct.

A person having an inkling of certain facts, who might have been watching Mr. Cameron's face, would have observed an expression thereon that plainly expressed:

"By George! I have been baffled!"

It was evident that Mr. Cameron had gone into the examination prepared to make a startling discovery.

His words to Mr. Comstock after the examination betrayed him.

"Hang it!" he said, addressing his partner in an undertone, "I do not understand it! The fellow's books are as straight as a string; it would be impossible for him to deceive me, as I studied just those points where deception would be attempted."

Mr. Comstock's remarks let out another secret concerning Mr. Cameron, proving that the latter individual was the original party to direct suspicion toward Henry Wilbur as the robber of the bonds.

"It may be possible that young Wilbur is as innocent of the theft of the bonds as he is of being deficient in his accounts?"

A dark frown came over the junior partner's face as he answered:

"I do not know how you can express such a doubt of his guilt after the facts I have furnished."

"Of course your facts leave no doubt of his guilt, and yet he is a young man whom I have always admired, and the last one whom I should have suspected, had it not been for the evidence you have furnished."

That same evening Mr. Cameron called upon a lady living in magnificent apartments, in a certain fashionable neighborhood.

The lady sat in the midst of the gorgeous furniture placed in the room.

She was a stately looking woman, remarkably handsome, and yet there was a coldness about her face and a steely glance in her eyes not at all attractive to a keen observer.

The latter also, despite the lady's beauty and the magnificence of her apparel, would have detected an underlying coarseness about her, proving that she had not been born to high breeding and culture.

Mr. Cameron, the junior partner of the great banking firm, was shown into the lady's presence.

At the office he had proclaimed her a relative, but the manner in which he approached, at the time of which we are writing, and his salutation, were hardly that which a male relative might render to a niece or a cousin.

Mr. Cameron advanced and clasped her in his arms, and essayed to imprint a kiss upon her red lips.

With a disdainful toss of her head, the magnificent woman drew her face back, and rudely untwining herself from his embrace, pushed him from her.

"Why, Julia, are you offended with me?"

"I am."

Mr. Cameron turned pale; passion of the most flaming type gleamed in his eyes, and it was evident that his sensitive heart was alarmed, as, in an anxious tone, he exclaimed:

"My precious darling, what have I done now to merit your disfavor?"

"You treat me in the most miserly manner. I want money—money! You promised me wealth, all that my heart could desire, when I yielded to your love, and how have you fulfilled your promise?"

As the magnificent woman spoke, she raised her handkerchief to her eyes, and her bosom heaved as though she were struggling to suppress the ready sobs bursting from her lips.

"Julia, have you any idea as to the amount of money I have supplied you with during the last few months?"

"A few thousands! Bah! had I not loved you, and had I accepted another love that was offered to me, I might have had millions even, had I wished."

"And so you shall in time; just wait until I have carried through a certain speculation I am engaged in, and every wish shall be gratified."

At this moment a neat-looking maid entered the room. In a tone of alarm, Mr. Cameron whispered:

"Who is that?"

CHAPTER IX.

DEEP PLAY.

"My new maid," was the answer of the woman who went by the name of *Mrs.* Cameron.

"How long have you had her in your employ?"

"Two days."

"Discharge her at once!"

"Discharge her?"

"Yes."

"Why, pray?"

"I will tell you, Julia. I am a man governed by impressions. When that girl entered the room I felt a cold chill run through me. I feel that in some way she will prove inimical to me. You must discharge her."

"How ridiculous, and how superstitious!"

"Never mind—it is my wish."

"And you expect me to discharge the most skillful maid I ever had, simply because you feel chilly at the moment she entered the room?" and Mrs. Cameron laughed in a satirical manner.

"I had hoped you would show more attention to my wishes."

"Why, Tom, I would sooner surrender you than part with that French girl! She is invaluable! She is just the party I have been longing to secure all my life."

"A French girl, is she?"

"Yes; and she can not speak one word of English."

"Are you sure?"

"I am. Why, dearie, she has not been in this country two weeks yet!"

"Well, I do not mind, then, if what you say is true; but you know maids are great eavesdroppers, and that girl, if she understood English, might overhear certain admissions from me that would prove ruinous."

"You need have no fears."

Had those two people known that the party they were speaking about was at that moment bending with her ear at the key-hole, with a look of intelligence upon her face that betrayed the fact that she understood every word that was being spoken at that very moment, it is more than likely that Mr. Cameron would have experienced a second chill that would have almost frozen his heart's blood.

Mr. Cameron was a shrewd, cunning man, and he did not exactly feel satisfied that the new maid did not understand English, and he determined to fully satisfy himself upon this point.

"Julia," he said, "call that girl into the room on some pretense."

"Why?"

"I wish to satisfy myself that you have not been deceived in some way."

"Nonsense!"

"It is a small favor."

"Lydia!" called Mrs. Cameron.

The maid came into the room, looking as innocent and demure as a coy school-girl.

Mrs. Cameron addressed some words to the maid in French, while Mr. Cameron said, in a loud voice, and in English:

"Why, Julia, where did you get that girl from? She is a thief!—her picture hangs in the rogues' gallery!"

When Mr. Cameron made this terrible charge his keen eyes were fixed upon the maid's face.

Not the least sign did she give of understanding the fearful charge that had been made against her.

Her eyes looked straight before her; not a change of color came to her cheeks; she could not have been more perfectly indifferent if she had been deaf and dumb.

Indignation beamed, however, upon the countenance of Mrs. Cameron, and she exclaimed:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I shall send for a policemen, and have that girl arrested at once!"

Still the girl looked as coy and unconcerned as she had upon first entering the room.

Mrs. Cameron, in French, dismissed her, and, turning to her pretended husband, said:

"What do you mean by such language?"

"Oh, I was only in fun!"

"But why insult the girl?"

"If she can not speak English, how can it be an insult?"

"Oh, thank you. I see now you were testing her. Well, what is your conclusion?"

"I'll swear that she does not understand one word of English. It would have been impossible for any woman living not to have made some sign, if she had understood the nature of a charge so suddenly made."

Had Mr. Cameron heard that same maid murmur in good English a moment later when beyond his presence:

"It was a cunning *ruse*, Mr. Cameron; but I was prepared for you, and am glad you tested me, my man. I will have less trouble in running you down."

After the episode described, Mrs. Cameron returned to the subject of money.

"When can you let me have a few thousands, Tom?"

"Not until I have carried through my speculation."

"Can not a rich banker like you draw a check for a few thousand?"

"You must remember that I am but a junior member of the firm. I have drawn so much money lately that I fear every day my seniors will call my attention to the fact; and to draw a few thousand more just at present would most certainly invite the catastrophe I dread."

"See here, Tom," said Mrs. Cameron, in a low, decisive tone, "I must have five thousand dollars this week."

"I can not let you have it."

Mrs. Cameron lowered her voice, and said, in what was almost a whisper:

"*Why not negotiate one of the bonds?*"

"It would be a fatal act, woman!" said the man, in a husky whisper, while a deathly pallor overspread his face.

"I could get one of them cashed, Tom, without any risk."

"No, no, woman, do not tempt me: it would ruin us both."

"I have a scheme. I know a plan that would work snug and safe."

"I tell you, do not tempt me."

"Then you and I must part! Thousands have been laid at my feet as an offer to leave you, and you know, Tom, our marriage vows lie so lightly upon us that it would be easy to get a divorce; remember that even your own partners do not know me as your wife."

"Oh, Julia! you will drive me mad!"

"And I will go mad unless I have the money; if you would but listen to my plan all would be well!"

"What is your plan?"

"It is one that would bring the whole matter to a head: send a man whom you know to be a rogue to jail and give you a chance to work up the bonds, all of them!"

"Who is the man who is a rogue?"

"That fellow Wilbur."

"Hang it! I fear that fellow is innocent!"

"Nonsense! Have you not yourself beheld him lose a thousand dollars at the faro-table on a salary less than two thousand?"

"But I dropped on him to-day, examined his books, and found his accounts all right."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"Well, Tom, you are green!" said the woman, in a sarcastic tone.

"How?"

"Do you not know that a faro-bank owner would loan him a few thousand to show up with for a day or two? Examine his books one week from now; do it unawares, and you will catch him."

"There is something in that."

"You will find that I am right."

"What is your plan, Julia?"

"I know a man who for a few hundred dollars will take one of these bonds, and negotiate it."

"And would be detected!"

"Exactly!"

"What are you driving at?"

"Why, that is just the contingency he would be prepared for: the man would swear that he got the bond from Henry Wilbur; and what is more, we can arrange to have him in the man's company for a few days, so as to have disinterested witnesses to corroborate the man's story."

"Should the man fail us in the end?"

"He would die before he would fail us."

"I would fear even if the man were my brother."

"I would fear your brother, but not mine."

"Is the man you would employ your brother?"

"I would trust no other man."

"By George, Julia! you are a genius, to confess the truth; although a member of the firm, my accounts would not stand an overhauling. I must have money."

"When will you be prepared to meet my brother?"

"Any time."

"All right. I will arrange for you to meet him to-morrow night. He will carry this matter through nicely."

"Why do you not make the arrangement with your brother?"

"I am a woman. I could suggest a plan; I could not carry it out."

Cameron remained some time longer with the siren who had lured him to the robbery, and who was again luring him to certain destruction.

Having carried her point, she was pleasant and agreeable, and during the remainder of his visit she resorted to all

those little endearments calculated to charm an already infatuated man to his destruction.

The two conspirators had well laid their plan as they supposed; but had either of them seen the smile of triumph upon the face of the French girl in the adjoining room, they would both have recoiled as though the gulf of perdition had yawned before them.

Half an hour after the departure of Mr. Cameron, another man was shown into the presence of Mrs. Cameron, showing that she too had need of a French maid who could not speak English.

CHAPTER X.

A LITTLE SCHEME IN THE BONDS.

"WELL, has the old lamb gone?" was the remark of a fashionably dressed young man, as he sauntered into the room.

"He has gone, Dick, and I have brought him around to let one of the bonds go flying in the air."

The young man, Dick, was a good-looking fellow, although his beauty, when closely scrutinized, would have panned out the same as Mrs. Cameron's, of the vulgar sort.

Again the French maid entered, when the fellow, Dick, like his predecessor, asked, the moment she had left the room:

"Who in thunder is that gal, Jule?"

"My new maid."

"By George! and she is a beauty. Where did you pick her up?"

"Oh, she came recommended to me; she is a French girl, and can not speak a word of English."

A strange light beamed in Dick's eyes, but he made no further remark concerning the girl at that moment; he had more important business on hand.

"You say your old lamb is going to let one of the bonds fly?"

"Yes."

"Who negotiates?"

"I have arranged for that little matter to be intrusted to you."

"It's risky; the Wall Street 'kites' are 'hovering close in' just now."

"Are you a coward?"

"Oh, no, sis, I'll run the string out; only you know you must let your lambie understand that he must come down handsome when it's a 'tickler.'"

"You're a fool, Dick!"

"How's that?"

"Don't you know that I intend to get every dollar of that little 'lift,' and then you and I will take the grand tour?"

"Very nice, my darling, but I tell you that you underrate your lamb. Cameron is awful soft on you, I'll admit, but his eyes are love-dusted just at this moment; if ever he gets over his infatuation, look out; he's a stocky man, keen as a whistle, and game; at the last moment he will astonish you, my dear."

"I will take all risks, and now to business; to-morrow night he is to meet you, and hand over a part of the swag. Where shall the meeting be?"

"At Doric's."

The place named was the same where Kate Goelet, the lady detective, had held her interview with Henry Wilbur, after having saved the young man's life.

"What room?"

"Room 20."

"What hour?"

"Ten o'clock."

"Say later."

"Why?"

"Well, it is better for mice to move when all in the house are asleep."

"Make it twelve."

"Good."

* * * * * * *

In a former chapter we mentioned that Kate Goelet had followed Mr. Cameron's visitor upon the first occasion when the lady detective saw her leave the banking-house.

Our heroine had tracked the woman to her home, but speedily reappeared in the vicinity and was just in time to see Mrs. Cameron leave her house.

The latter lady reached the corner of the street when she beheld a young, lady-like-looking girl, standing against the iron rail of a fence weeping.

Mrs. Cameron stopped to inquire the cause of the girl's sorrow.

The weeping maiden indicated that she could not speak English, and made a reply in French.

It chanced that Mrs. Cameron's father had been a Frenchman, and the woman spoke the language well.

In a tearful manner the weeping girl told how she had come from Paris, and how on the steamer, in the steerage, she had been robbed of all her effects, and, further, how she had paid her board for one week by the sale of a few ornaments, but that now all her money was gone, and she had been turned penniless from her boarding-house.

"What brought you to this country?"

"To get a situation as lady's-maid."

"Are you a skillful hair-dresser?"

"Oh, madame, I have served the best ladies in Paris."

Mrs. Cameron was a woman who cared little about recommendations, and, as shrewd as she was in one sense, could be easily imposed upon.

She believed the French girl's tale, and determined to employ her.

That same evening her skill as a hair-dresser was put to the test, and her wonderful manipulation of the madame's hair won the latter's heart.

The French girl had asked permission to go away that night and return the following afternoon, stating that she had some little business to arrange.

Permission was granted, and the lady detective managed to accomplish all that has been related, and at the proper time returned to her mistress.

The following night, at twelve, the one bond was to be put on the fly.

Kate Goelet knew that she must be on hand.

The day following the scenes related, Mr. Cameron called again upon the woman who bore his name.

The details for the midnight meeting were arranged, and the sly Kate Goelet secured all the points of the intended conspiracy.

The lady detective had laid well her plans, and was prepared to take long chances.

At about half past eleven, four men entered the house of the man whom Dick Coulter had denominated as "Doric."

The whole party were under the leadership of a little man, whom the sitters around the place addressed as "Frenchy," and it appeared that his companions were Frenchmen also.

The party proceeded to room 19, and at once a singular scene occurred.

They all removed their boots; two of them produced strange-looking little glasses, and the chairs and table were arranged against the wall separating room 19 from No. 20.

The party of four had been in the room but a few moments, when steps were heard in the hall, and a party entered the adjoining room.

At once the four Frenchies leaped noiselessly upon the chairs and table, and assumed a suspicious position, indicating that they were bent upon watching some little transaction about to occur in room 20.

Among the number in room 20 was Dick Coulter; the latter had made no effort to conceal his identity.

The second party was a stranger, and the third man was none other than Mr. Cameron, junior partner in the banking firm of Attry, Comstock & Co.

Dick Coulter was the first spokesman, and in an easy, off-handed tone, he said:

"I believe you have a few bonds you want to convert, Mr. Cameron?"

"Conditionally."

"Ah! what are your conditions?"

"A knowledge, in the first place, as to how you intend to dispose of them."

"I shall place them in the hands of a man who is up to the racket from beginning to end."

"What is the man's name?"

"Young."

"What Young? the broker whose office is in New Street?"

"The same."

Mr. Cameron appeared surprised. He knew Mr. Young was a man who bore a fine reputation on the street as an honest, straightforward man.

"Do you mean to tell me that Young deals in off-color bonds?"

"He deals in nothing else—only at times, as a blind."

"You know who I am?"

"Yes, sir."

"By what name would you address me if you saw me on the street?"

Dick Coulter winked, and said, in a significant tone:

"It would be strange if I did not know Henry Wilbur, the man I have spent a good many nights in company with, tiger-hunting."

"Has any one seen you in my company?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

"They are all well dusted who saw us together?"

"You bet! I know my business right up to the handle."

"Your friend there—he knows me?"

"He could swear to you on a stack of law books as high as the court-house, without winking."

"How long do you suppose it will be before the bonds are dropped on after Young has them?"

"You must arrange that yourself."

"How?"

"You must set a detective on Young's track."

"Then he will be arrested."

"Of course."

"And he will 'squeal'?"

"Certainly."

"And to save himself, expose the whole affair?"

"No, sir; he can only 'squeal' on me. I will be arrested, and then I can turn State's evidence, and prove from whom I received the bonds."

Mr. Cameron was thoughtful awhile, and at length said:

"It's a magnificent scheme; but, after all, it depends upon your gameness."

"I run no risk in the matter, and the whole affair will go through like oil."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEETING IN "ROOM TWENTY."

MR. CAMERON exchanged a few more words with his cool confederate, and then handed over a number of bonds.

While in that room the three rogues presented a splendid life-like tableau.

Dick Coulter and Cameron sat in such a manner that both their faces were plainly revealed toward the partition dividing them from the adjoining room, No. 19.

Had the conspirators known of the extraordinary little occurrences transpiring so near them they would have recoiled in horror.

At the proper moment our readers shall be informed of the wonderful detective operation performed in that room.

Having delivered the bonds, after a few more words of caution, Mr. Cameron departed.

A few moments later, and the mysterious occupants of room No. 19 also departed.

The day following the scene above recorded the French girl was serving her mistress as quietly and demurely as though nothing extraordinary was going on.

At a late hour in the afternoon Mr. Cameron called at the home of the lady who pretended to bear his name.

He was always a quiet, cunning man, sly as a cat, and on the alert to make discoveries.

He was an exceedingly jealous and suspicious man, and as he was passing through the hall toward the front room of the apartments occupied by Mrs. Cameron, an impulse caused him to stop in front of the door of the rear room and peep through the key-hole.

He saw the French maid seated at a table writing.

The circumstance, though but a trifling one, aroused his suspicions.

He changed his position several times, and at length walked away, with a very troubled look upon his face.

Mr. Cameron carried a night-key to the apartments, and inserting it in the lock, he turned it noiselessly, and stole into the room as a sneak-thief would.

He found the room unoccupied, when he performed a very singular act; he removed his boots without making any noise, and on tiptoe moved through the passage leading from the front to the back room.

The door opening into the latter was ajar.

Opposite the opening, hanging upon the wall, was a mirror.

By looking into the mirror he could see the reflected form of the French maid, and what was more startling, he saw reflected also the paper upon which she was writing.

A cold chill passed over his frame as a suspicion flashed across his mind.

From his pocket he drew a small pocket-glass; the latter he held in such a manner that the written page in front of the French maid was reflected.

His face assumed the hue of death.

He could decipher but a few words, but they were *English*.

After all, his first suspicions were correct.

The supposed green French maid was a fraud.

It was certain she could write English if she could not speak it, but the most certain conclusion was that she could do both.

Mr. Cameron moved back into the front room, replaced his boots, and for an instant considered what he should do.

At length he resolved to boldly enter the room, seize the written page, and to her face accuse the cunning French girl of duplicity.

Ere he could carry out his resolution a most remarkable little incident occurred.

He heard the French girl coming through the passage.

She was warbling a tune as innocently and happily as a bird.

As she entered the room and saw Mr. Cameron she uttered a pretty little scream of surprise, started to leave the room in confusion, returned as though to approach him, turned about again, and still again returned, and approaching Mr. Cameron, in a pretty, timid manner, and while blushing to the temples, said, at the same moment, holding forth a written page:

"Ah, monsieur! I bes bold you loak at ze lisson in English, eh?"

Mr. Cameron glanced at the written page. It was the same he had seen reflected in the mirror, and it was scribbled over alternately with French and English sentences.

The man was amazed.

He spoke to her, and she held toward him a French and English dictionary.

He spoke to her again, and she shook her head negatively, and in the most frank and innocent manner said, "I learn English quick."

Mr. Cameron felt that he had been mistaken, and his fears were allayed.

It was not possible that the girl was acting; such a conclusion would have been too extravagantly improbable.

The cunning man did not dream that the tell-tale mirror had reflected two ways, and that he was at that moment the victim of the finest piece of acting ever performed by a human being.

The scene had just closed when Mrs. Cameron entered, and the French girl, uttering a few words of explanation in French, left the room.

While talking to Mr. Cameron she held concealed in her pocket the fragment of a note, addressed to Henry Wilbur.

"I have had quite a fright!" observed Mr. Cameron, when he and the woman were alone.

"What frightened you? Has my maid been making love to you?"

"No, but I had, as I thought, proof that she was an impostor."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the woman, while Mr. Cameron proceeded and related what had occurred.

Mrs. Cameron said, "Oh, nonsense!" and pretended to pass the matter off as a great joke, but she was herself a deep and cunning woman.

She resolved to watch that innocent French girl.

No suspicion entered her mind as to the real truth, but she had other little private reasons.

If the stranger was playing a part it was a deep game, and the designing woman within the moment had framed in her mind some very startling deductions.

After the departure of Mr. Cameron, she sat down, and soon commenced some very profound thinking.

The wicked and treacherous are always suspicious, and a suspicious woman will let her feelings, when once aroused, run away with her reason, as a prairie fire rushes roaring madly through the dry grass.

When she came to think, it struck her as strange that the girl should have met her so conveniently; then, again, it was strange that Mr. Cameron should have *suspected* the girl without cause.

The woman was now in a perfect frenzy of suspicion.

It was suggested to her mind that Mr. Cameron's singular suspicions were only a pretense and a "blind," that he had gotten up the scene to lure her to more security, and, to cap all, while her suspicions were once thus keenly alive, she considered it a singular circumstance that she should have suddenly entered and caught her lord and her maid talking together.

The story Mr. Cameron had told her was an extraordinary one—a tale too singular for belief. For a woman to suspect is, in most cases, to believe.

Mrs. Cameron had heard Dick Coulter say that her lord was a deep and cunning man. She knew that, as far as her relations with her dupe were concerned, she could not stand watching.

The result of all her thinking was the conclusion that the French maid was a fraud, and that she was in the pay of Mr. Cameron.

"I am equal to the occasion," she muttered, "and if I find that my suspicions are correct I'll silence that girl's tongue! She will discover that she has placed her head in the lion's jaw. I'll silence her," added the woman, in a husky voice, while a terrible expression came over her face.

In a moment the expression passed, and she called the maid in her most ordinary tone.

The girl came tripping into the room, and Mrs. Cameron asked suddenly in English:

"Were you writing a letter?"

The girl assumed a confused look, and shook her head.

Mrs. Cameron had tried Mr. Cameron's tactics, and had been baffled.

In French she asked some ordinary question, and was quickly answered.

That night, about two hours after the supposed French maid had retired, Mrs. Cameron on tiptoe stole into her room.

The cunning woman had provided herself with a bottle of clear-looking liquid and a silk handkerchief.

It was evidently her intention to prevent the maid from awaking during the prosecution of a thorough search of her clothing and baggage.

It had become a game of deep play between two deep and cunning women.

Mrs. Cameron had provided against surprise, and with a Lady Macbeth step, stole toward the room where her startling discoveries were to be made.

With careful hand she turned the door-knob, and glided into the room.

Once within she prepared her handkerchief, and stepped lightly beside the bed.

Deftly her hand wandered over the pillow, a cold chill ran over her frame, her hand encountered only a smooth and unruffled surface.

With trembling hand she turned on the gas and lit it, when a sight met her gaze that caused her to utter an exclamation of surprise.

The bed *was unoccupied;* in fact, had not been touched that night.

There was now no more reason to doubt. Mr. Cameron had set a spy upon her. Little did that guilty woman dream of the real truth!

CHAPTER XII.

AN ODD DISCOVERY.

WHILE Mrs. Cameron was exploring in the room of her French maid, that mysterious person was the heroine of an adventure destined to have an effect upon her fate ever after.

Kate Goelet had played her cards so well, and had gathered so much information, that she felt satisfied that she could lay her hand upon the whole bulk of the bonds.

She did not wish to make certain moves until she had secured them.

The words uttered by Dick Coulter had served as a warning to her; and she feared that in case a certain blow should fail, the victim would escape by his own hands, but that the property would never be recovered, and her work would not be complete unless they were restored to their original owner.

On the night when the scenes occurred that we have depicted, she had retired to her room at the proper hour, but only remained a moment, when she performed a most singular act.

She passed up the scuttle-way, and, ascending to the roof, walked along lightly until she came to a scuttle-way a few doors below, which she raised, and descended to the first floor, when, inserting a key in the lock of one of the rooms, she entered a handsomely furnished apartment.

That our readers may not be bothered with any mystery, we will state that about the same time the French maid entered the service of Mrs. Cameron a modest-looking woman hired furnished apartments on the top floor of a house a few doors below Mrs. Cameron's residence.

It is hardly necessary to state that Miss Kate Goelet was the woman in question, and the securing of the room was a simple but necessary part of her programme.

Kate Goelet had led a strange and romantic life; but within the few weeks that she had been acting as a detective to discover the stolen bonds, she had fallen upon the real romance of a woman's existence.

It was not alone the hope of a reward that was inciting her to work up the mystery.

Ever since the night she had first met Henry Wilbur a new motive had agitated her.

Like a sudden gleam of sunlight flashing into a dark corner, a radiant hope had blazed away down in her heart.

She was but a woman, and women are strange beings when the affairs of the heart are concerned.

It was but ten o'clock when she left the apartment she had hired for a purpose, and she was robed in the most magnificent garments when she appeared.

Half an hour later a carriage stopped in front of a well-known public hall.

At the moment a select *bal-masqué* was in full progress.

A lady, heavily masked, alighted from the carriage, and, presenting a card at the door, passed into the hall.

A few moments after her entrance the mysterious masker issued from the ladies' room and mingled with the merry maskers, disguised as a gray nun.

From group to group she sauntered.

As is well known, the mask, serving as an *incognito,* permits a universal salutation among those who have never met before and who may never meet again.

The cavalier will address the peasant, and the latter will fire his familiar shot at the king.

The nun may be seen arm in arm with the harlequin, while some jolly friar argues theology with a seeming Satan in person.

Upon the removal of the masks, all fall back to the ordinary decorous reserve that distinguishes the association of strangers; but during the hours while the masks are held the merry, unrestrained fun and freedom goes on.

Diamonds of purest water glittered in the ears of the gray nun, and upon her fingers sparkled rings of great value—such gewgaws illy becoming the somber character she had assumed.

But what the real nun might eschew the mimic maiden of the convent can wear.

The gray nun moved from group to group, addressing a gay word to this peasant on one hand, and that cavalier on the other.

Then to the king, in all his royal splendors, she would address a word, and next to some gowned monk she passed a merry jest.

It was a matter of remark that all her salutations were confined to men.

At length she appeared discouraged, and retired to a seat, while a number of the gay revelers formed for the dance.

The gray nun had thus been seated for a few moments, when a cavalier came and seated himself beside her, and, in a bantering tone, said:

"Ah! ha! I'll whisper to the lady superior of thy little dissipation this night."

"Indeed, sir," answered the nun, in a sharp tone, "'tis easy to see thou art some lackey rigged out in his master's plumes."

"Prithee, but thou'rt sharp of tongue!"

"Nay, nay; not because I know thee in thy disguise."

"Why hast thou set me down as one in borrowed plumes?"

"No true cavalier would be a tale-bearer; but 'tis the lackey's trade to tell tales, and his master's robes do not bring with them the master's honor."

The above conversation was carried on with mock solemnity, and in a merry, bantering tone.

Had the cavalier been as watchful and as keen of sense as the gray nun he would have noticed a slight tremulousness in the lady's tones.

It may have been that he was so charmed by her skillful repartee that he thought of naught else; as keen-witted as he was he received a Roland for an Oliver every time, and the word-play of the mysterious gray nun was much keener than his own.

A moment and the cavalier was beckoned away, and as he crossed the room he muttered:

"My heavens! if yon merry nun is as beautiful as she is witty, it were a pleasure indeed to see that mask set aside."

As the cavalier moved away the gray nun laid her jeweled hand over her heart, and murmured:

"I can not be mistaken! Oh, heavens! it is he."

The festivities continued for some time, when a second time the cavalier approached the gray nun.

The latter saw him start to come toward her, and in an under-tone, remarked:

"'Twill be good game; he shall see my face; I know 'tis for that he seeks me again."

As the cavalier approached, he said, in a gallant tone:

"I know thou art beautiful, and to speak fairly I have wagered that thou wert; now prithee, am I to have a glimpse of that fair face?"

"Indeed, thou dost know me?"

"On my honor I do not."

"Thou hast seen me before; thou shouldst know my voice."

"Indeed," said the knight, as he raised his gauntleted hand to his brow, "I can not recall one familiar tone, and I boast a good ear, and my memory is most excellent."

"Thou art a good actor, and wouldst mislead me to think that thou hast forgotten the tones of my voice. If 'tis true, thou dost me no compliment."

In their merry humor the cavalier and nun assumed the form of address peculiar to the age when gallant knights paid their *devoirs* to ladies fair and wore their colors at the tournament.

"Now, really, art thou making me thy sport, or have we really met before?"

"We have."

"Then pray remove thy mask, thou hast but whetted my curiosity."

"Nay, thou must test thy memory, and recall first the tones of my voice."

"I am at a loss."

"Hast not the least suspicion?"

"Not the least."

"And thou wouldst see my face?"

"I beseech that I may."

"Well, follow me; thy earnestness hast won for thee the favor thou cravest."

Little did either of the merry people dream of the fate that overhung the removal of that mask.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE UNMASKING.

THE gray nun led the way to one of the retiring-rooms.

Once away from the crowd of maskers, Henry Wilbur, who was the cavalier, exclaimed:

"So my disguise has been penetrated within the first half hour of my arrival?"

"How know you that your disguise has been penetrated?"

"It needs not a second guess to so decide; and now, pray who may be the fair lady whose keen glance has shot beneath my mask?"

"One who would warn you of danger."

"Warn me of danger?"

"Yes."

"Pray, what danger threatens me?"

"The danger of bad associates!"

"Indeed! but you are taking liberties with my mode of life!"

"I have reason."

"Now, by George! your language entitles me to demand to see your face."

"You have seen my face?"

"Well, I would see it again, to refresh my memory as to the benevolent countenance of one who appears to take such a warm interest in my fate!"

"Should you see my face, the charm and romance of my wizard warning would be all lost!"

"Why?"

"Simply, if you do not see my face, your imagination may picture it as being beautiful; if you do see it, you will learn the stern reality!"

"Begone, then, false imaginings, and let me stand face to face with the *stern* reality!"

"No, no; it is enough that I have warned you to give up your bad associates!"

"But, mysterious stranger, in self-defense I must declare that I do not claim to have any bad associates!"

"That is because you are blinded."

"How blinded?"

"You think them good!"

"Now, by Heaven, I'll tear aside your mask unless you grant me one glimpse!"

The masker uttered a pretty little laugh, and began naming a number of places where Henry Wilbur had been in the habit of going, which betrayed a most extraordinary acquaintance with his habits and modes of life generally.

Henry was completely mystified.

Matters were related that he supposed no human being was cognizant of besides himself.

"Are you some second-sight seer, or seventh daughter of a seventh daughter?" he asked, in a perplexed manner.

"I am but a simple person who has had eyes and ears open."

"Let me see your face."

"Why, you foolish man, know that I am an old woman! The young and giddy do not volunteer such advice as I have been administering to you."

"I am assured that you are not old, but young and beautiful."

"Nonsense!"

"It is not nonsense. I have my eyes about me as well as yourself. That pretty hand toying with that fan is not the property of one old and wrinkled."

"Well, good-bye, Sir Cavalier. I have warned you—take heed. And now once again, adieu."

The gray nun rose from the seat where she had thrown herself upon entering the room, and moved as though to go away.

Henry Wilbur, laid his hand upon her arm lightly, and said:

"No, no; you can not go! You have said words to me that make it absolutely necessary that I should see your face."

"You must let me pass!"

"No. I do not wish to be rude; but you know all is fair in love and war. You have played a little romance upon me, and I must see—"

"Hold!"

The cavalier had seized the lady's mask, when she caught his arm, and exclaimed, in a sharp tone:

"Hold!"

Henry was not to be baffled, however, and he did force the mask aside, actually tearing it completely off the lady's face.

In his astonishment, when that beautiful face was revealed, he recoiled, bearing the mask in his hand.

At the same moment a gentleman entered the room.

The latter was attired in a fancy costume, and he entered just in time to behold the unmasked face of the beautiful woman.

Henry Wilbur returned the mask, and noting an offended look on the lady's face, he said:

"You certainly must excuse me, but your extraordinary knowledge of my affairs emboldened me to act with seeming rudeness."

The look of indignation faded, and a smile, roguish and ravishingly sweet, overspread her lovely face, as she said:

"I forgive you."

During this whole scene, the man who had entered the room stood near the threshold an interested witness.

The lady returned the mask to her face, and Henry Wilbur, stepping up beside her, said:

"I recognize you."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"Where have you seen me before to-night?"

"You are the lady toward whom I acted so rudely in the street one night some time back."

A further conversation ensued of a pleasant character, and Henry invited the beautiful woman to dance.

Two hours followed of gay fun.

Henry Wilbur was charmed as he had never been charmed in all his life.

The face of the girl whom he had met upon that night had haunted him ever since as a pleasant dream, and now that he had seen her again, radiant in all her extraordinary beauty, a wonderful impression had been left upon his heart.

The hour approached when the assembly were to unmask.

Henry was still charmed by the wit and sparkle of his companion's conversation, when suddenly she exclaimed:

"I must go!"

"No, no: I must accompany you to your home."

"You can not."

"And why?"

"I can give no explanation."

A sudden suspicion of the most terrible character flashed over Henry's mind.

"May I ask you one question?"

"You would know my name?"

"Yes; but that is not the question I would ask."

"I am listening."

"Are you a *married woman?*"

A merry laugh came from behind the lady's mask, and she answered:

"I am not!"

"Your name?"

"I can not tell you my name."

"Why this mystery?"

"You shall know some day."

The mysterious girl rose to go to the dressing-room, and Henry would have detained her, when she exclaimed:

"I pray you do not follow me! Promise on your honor, you will not!"

"On one condition."

"What is the condition?"

"That you will meet me again."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Where?"

"Anywhere."

The lady named a place and hour, and hastened away.

Henry Wilbur was a remarkably handsome man, but, owning to the fact that he was a poor man, he had never allowed his attention to be seriously attracted by any woman.

At last, however, an impression had been made upon his heart that he began to realize could never be effaced.

The romantic circumstances under which he had met the mysterious beauty aided in exciting his imagination, and as there are moments liable to come to the coldest hearts when all their iciness melts before the blaze of some sudden destiny, so all our hero's indifference had vanished away, and he did not deny to himself that he had been wounded just where he thought himself for the time being invulnerable.

He would have liked to have followed the masked beauty, but having promised not to, he consoled himself with anticipations of the meeting on the coming day.

In the meantime the gray nun had resumed her wrappings, and was passing the entrance leading from the hall when a voice whispered in her ear:

"The French maid has acquired a knowledge of English in a marvelously short space of time!"

The party addressed turned to see who had spoken such strange words in her ear, but no one was near, save a number of masked females.

Kate Goelet remembered that at the time Henry Wilbur had removed her mask, a stranger disguised as a cavalier, had been standing in the door-way.

She knew at once that the party who had penetrated her disguise must have been that cavalier.

She was greatly astonished that any one had been able to identify her and was assured, from the fact that such identification had taken place, that some shrewd and keen party was upon her track.

She could remember but one person whom she had met during her late adventures to whom she could ascribe sufficient keenness for such a discovery.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEEP TREACHERY.

THE matter annoyed her considerably.

If her disguise had been penetrated, her little game in one direction was necessarily blocked.

Still thinking over the matter, she walked down to the street from the hall and entered her carriage.

As the man who drove her was supposed to know her, she said nothing to him more than to find out that it was the same coachman who had brought her to the hall.

Once in the carriage, she gave herself to intense thought, and so absorbed was she that she failed to observe that the carriage was being drawn at a tremendous pace, and that she was being carried a long distance.

Suddenly, however, she was recalled to herself, and chanced to glance out of the window, when she gave a start, and one expressive word fell from her lips.

"Treachery!" she muttered, and settled herself back like one resigned to some adverse fate, over which she had no control.

An ordinary woman would have screamed and made a great ado upon making such a discovery, but the lady detective was perfectly cool, and commenced to think over what she should do under the circumstances.

Had she chosen, she could have opened the coach-door and leaped forth, but that, as she thought, might not prove the best plan.

After thinking a moment, she muttered:

"All right! I will sit still and let them play out their little game: I will at least learn thereby just what they are up to, and from what quarter I have to apprehend danger."

Kate Goelet was not at all alarmed concerning her personal safety.

She had resources for self-protection ingeniously arranged, and felt perfectly able to take care of herself, although but a young and delicate woman.

It was not long before she discovered that she had left the city, and was being driven along an unpaved road.

A few moments longer, and the carriage was stopped in front of a villa, situated in the midst of a large park filled with trees.

As the carriage stopped, two men appeared at either door of the coach, and one of them, as he opened the door, remarked:

"Do not be afraid; you shall be returned unharmed."

"I am not at all afraid," was the cool reply.

"Will you alight?"

"Certainly."

The lady detective stepped from the coach, and, glancing up toward the driver's box, remarked, in a perfectly cool tone:

"Haven't you made a mistake, Mr. Driver?"

"No, madame; the gentleman, your husband, ordered me to drive here!"

"Ah! you have found a husband for me, eh? Well, my man, I know who you are, and you will be held responsible for my safe return!"

"Ain't this your home, ma'am?"

"You know it is not, and you will wait here to drive me home when I am ready to go. You will drive away at your peril." Then, turning toward one of the men standing at her side, she said, coolly, "Now, sir, I am ready to have you carry out your little joke!"

"This way, madame!" said the man, in a confused sort of tone.

The lady detective prepared to follow him, when she heard the driver whisper to the other man:

"Look here, 'cully,' that 'ere lady has got me down fine; now I want yer to understand that no harm must come to her till I take her back to where I got her from, do you mind?"

Kate Goelet was led up a broad flight of steps, and was standing before a massive front door, when suddenly a man came behind her, and a hood or shawl was thrown over her head.

She made no resistance.

It was plain that they meant to mask her, yet she did not utter a single cry or show the least alarm.

She felt herself a match for the conspirators, cunning as they thought themselves.

One of the men whispered, as the hood was thrown over her head:

OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

CLEVELAND, U.S.A., AUGUST 7, 1908.

A publication devoted to high-class Detective Literature. Published on alternate Fridays, by The Arthur Westbrook Company, 1422 Third Street, N. W., Cleveland, U. S. A.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE.

Per Year	$1.50
Six Months	.75
Three Months	.40

Postage paid to all parts of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, the Canal Zone, Hawaii and the Phillipines. Stamps accepted the same as money. *Address letters to*

The Arthur Westbrook Company, Cleveland, U.S.A.

Tit-Bits of General Information

FROM ALL THE WORLD.

Some of the icefields of Greenland are believed to be a mile and a half in thickness.

A cheque for $10, written on a strip of leather, has been presented and cashed at a Pittsburg bank.

Every winter, as soon as the Neva at St. Petersburg is frozen over, a service of electric cars is started to run across it on the ice.

At the Baldwin Locomotive Works, Philadelphia, the clerks are so expert in handing out wages on pay-day that 18,000 men receive their pay in less than twenty minutes.

The biggest leaves in the world are those of the Inaj palm, which grows on the banks of the Amazon. They reach a length of 30 ft. to 50 ft., and are from 10 ft. to 12 ft. in breadth.

When the telephone wires are overland, the speed of transmission is at the rate of 16,000 miles a second; where the wires are through cables under the sea, the speed is only 6,020 miles a second.

Robert P. Peters, of Sioux, Iowa, who has just celebrated his ninety-fourth birthday, has been in the city police for seventy-five years, and claims the record as the oldest municipal officer in the United States.

The rat is such a nuisance that in England alone it is estimated he causes damage to the extent of $50,000,000 every year. If all the young rats lived, a single pair would in three years multiply to 646,000 rats.

The German Emperor's Imperial train cost $930,000, and took three years to construct. There are altogether twelve cars, including two nursery carriages. The reception saloon contains several pieces of statuary, and each of the sleeping cars is fitted with a bath.

Men in Belgium are not on an equality as voters. Unmarried men over twenty-five years of age have one vote, married men and widowers with families have two votes, and priests and certain other persons have three votes. Severe penalties are imposed on those who fail to vote.

Many old houses in Holland have a special door which is never opened, save on two occasions—when there is a marriage or a death in the family. The bride and bridegroom enter by this door; and it is then nailed or barred up until a death occurs, when it is opened, and the body is removed by this exit.

In the northern part of Madagascar is the most remarkable natural fortress in the world. It is occupied by a wild tribe who call themselves the People of the Rocks. The fortress is a lofty and precipitous rock of enormous size, 1,000 ft. high and eight square miles in area. Its sides are so steep that it cannot be climbed without artificial means. Within it is hollow, and the only entrance is by a subterranean passage.

HOW AIRSHIP DISASTERS OCCUR.

THE DANGERS OF THE NAVIGABLE BALLOON.

The accident to the mammoth airship "Ariel," from which sixteen passengers were flung to the ground from a height of 300 ft., instances a danger which is ever present in navigable balloons. Every time such a vessel makes an ascent the passengers run the risk of the balloon bursting owing to the sudden expansion of the gas causing an exceptional distension of the envelope.

The ordinary old-fashioned balloon simply consists of a bag of gas, the bottom end of which is left open; as a result there is no fear of the balloon bursting. When a spherical balloon reaches such a height that the gas expands, there is not the slightest danger of any bursting taking place, as the gas escapes through the open vent. This is why the balloon is orange-shaped when it goes up and pear-shaped when it comes down.

In the navigable balloon, however, it is not possible to have an open escape for the gas. It is very important that the envelope be properly distended, otherwise the balloon looses its shape and begins to sag in the middle; it is owing to the danger caused by the balloon losing its shape that various arrangements are in use ensuring the stability in case of a loss of gas.

The cigar-shaped balloon which has lost a good amount of gas usually begins to close up like a razor; the result is that the enormous strains are thrown on the cords which support the car at the end of the balloon, all the weight being on these cords. One by one they break, until either the car is hurled to the ground or the whole apparatus collapses in a shapeless mass.

Well-made navigable balloons are always provided with proper safety-valves, which are so arranged to allow the gas to escape only when the pressure becomes too great for the safety of the enveloping fabric. It is unfortunately the case, however, that inexperienced aeronauts do not always make proper use of these, and so the balloon bursts.

The most remarkable instance of this kind was in the ascent made by M. Severo, in his navigable balloon, "Pax." That balloon was provided with two safety-valves for the escape of gas when the tension became too great, but M. Severo stopped up one of these with wax before the ascent, thinking that he might be able to accomplish more on the voyage.

With the assistant he got into the car, and made the great mistake of the novice of rising too rapidly. His assistant was so frightened that in his panic he threw out a whole sackful of ballast, which caused the balloon to shoot up into the air like a stone from a catapult. There was a tremendous explosion, and the two unlucky aeronauts were dashed to the earth within eight seconds, being smashed to pulp.

The navigable balloon, when driven through the air at a high velocity, also runs a great risk of bursting in another way unknown to the spherical kind. There is a great tendency for the end of the balloon to be blown out. This is not the front part of the bag, as might be imagined, but the rear part.

The gas in the front part of the concern is pressed upon heavily by the atmosphere as the balloon rushes along, and this forces the gas against the hinder portion. Not only is there additional pressure of the gas at the back part, but there is pressure of air—in fact, a vacuum is formed.

The result is a dangerous pressure, which is often sufficient to burst out the end of the envelope, and so cause a terrible disaster. In order to cope with this, the best dirigible balloons have extra thicknesses of material in order to strengthen the rear end, and so to prevent the tail point of the balloon being forced out.

Another source of danger to the cigar-shaped balloon is the presence of clouds passing in front of the sun. The passage of a cloud in front of the sun will cast a shadow which chills the gas to such an extent that the balloon may wrinkle and descend with considerable velocity. On the other hand, should the clouds break and the sun shine through, the gas may expand with sudden force sufficient to burst the envelope.

If much ballast is thrown out, the balloon is bound to come to grief and a terrible disaster happen. Greatly mistaken notions are prevalent regarding the amount of sand which is thrown out in order to make a balloon rise. A sackful of ballast thrown out at once is pretty certain to cause a disaster; even if a mere handful of sand be thrown out, it is sufficient to make the balloon jump to an appreciable height.

It is surprising what a small thing may alter the stability of the vessel; moisture condensing on the envelope, a sudden gust of wind, the presence of a warm or cold current of air—all have a big effect upon the balloon. Thus it is that there are many dangers to be faced by the aeronauts on dirigible airships—dangers from which the ordinary balloon is quite free.

Twenty-Nine Days—Five Saturdays—This year's calendar shows a peculiarity in February not often to be seen. The first day of February falls upon a Saturday and the last of the month happened on the same day of the week. In the month, therefore, there were five Saturdays. Similar conditions only happen once in twenty-eight years.

Six months to make a carpet.—There has been placed in the sanctuary of the high altar at Westminster Roman Catholic Cathedral a large carpet from Smyrna which, on account of its size—32 ft. long by 12 ft. wide—had to be specially made in Turkey, the work taking six months to complete.

Shorthand Without Hands.—A youth of fifteen, named Possneck, who two years ago lost both his hands in a machinery accident at Arnstadt, has accomplished the remarkable feat of gaining a speed certificate for shorthand. After his mishap, by which his hands were cut off at the wrists, he was received into a cripples' home. The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, one of the patrons, took an active interest in the lad and paid for two artificial hands. The cripple soon became so expert in their use that he is now an excellent penman, and can write shorthand at the rate of 115 words per minute.

Asleep for Three and a Half Years.—An astonishing trance case has come to light in Berlin. A clerk, aged forty-six—a healthy, normal man—suddenly fell asleep in June, 1904. All efforts to awaken him were unsuccessful, and he was placed in bed, where he is still. The sleeper since then has never opened his eyes. He breathes regularly and swallows his food mechanically, but is insensible to the severest attempts to rouse him.

Married One Hundred Years.—From Vienna comes a story of an aged couple who have been married 100 years. They live in the Hungarian village of Isonbolgi. The husband is said to be 120 years old and his wife 116. They have no fewer than 712 descendants. The old couple live in a modest cottage; they are almost blind, and spend most of their time sleeping. The patriarch can still smoke his pipe, however, and from time to time he drinks a glass of wine. The couple have never seen a railway train.

Enormous Water-Slides.—Near the St. Lawrence River, in Canada, there is a water-slide three miles long for conveying pulp-wood to the railway. It is capable of moving nearly 8,000 cubic feet of wood per hour. The company operating this slide had at one time a pile of pulp-wood 1,000 ft. long, 26 ft. high, and 40 ft. wide, all of which had been transported from the woods to the railway by this novel method. One company have on one of their jobs a water-slide seven miles long, by which their pulp stock is carried to the river, whence it is driven to their mills.

Music in the Air.—A revolving piano and pianist making music in mid-air is one of the latest attractions at the New York Hippodrome. The exhibition is described as a "Hindu mystery." Under a show of hypnotic influence, both piano and pianist rise up from a platform, and having, by some unknown agency, reached a certain height, the instrument begins to sway from side to side, and in due course is seen swiftly revolving together with the performer, to the strains of the "Merry Widow" Waltz. The performer, it is said, never misses a note, even while upside-down.

The Largest Restaurant in the World.—New York is to have the largest restaurant in the world, seating 8,000 people. It is to be built on Broadway, and $1,000,000 has already been subscribed by the syndicate. The roof garden, with real trees and turf, a fountain, and a 50 ft. lake, will be a reproduction in miniature of the famous gardens of the Trianon at Versailles. The restaurant proper will occupy the entire ground floor of the building. It will be 200 ft. long, and will seat comfortably 4,000 people, while the roof garden is to accommodate a similar number.

"Do not be afraid!"

"I am not afraid; sharper men than yourselves are watching over me!"

She was led within the house, up a flight of stairs, and into a room carpeted in the richest manner, as she discovered the moment her feet touched it.

A few moments passed, when, discovering that she was alone, she removed the hood from her head.

She found herself in an elegantly furnished apartment.

The gas was turned low, but sufficient light was afforded for her to discern every object in the room.

Fully ten minutes passed, when a door opened, and a man, closely masked, entered the room.

The lady detective did not speak, but waited for the chief conspirator to open his business.

After a moment the masked man said:

"Madame, I suppose you are surprised at the innocent little trick that has been played upon you?"

"Not at all," was the cool reply.

"You are not surprised?"

"No."

"Nor alarmed?"

"No."

"You are very brave!"

"I was born so."

"You are in my power!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"Well, I do not know as that disturbs me. You appear to be surrounded with every luxury; and, of course, having brought me here, you must intend that I should enjoy them?"

The man muttered an ejaculation under his mask, expressive of his astonishment at the strange woman's imperturbable coolness.

"I did not bring you here to enjoy yourself, madame!"

"Indeed! Then you are very ungallant!"

"I have a few questions to ask you."

"Proceed."

"You are the French maid who is in service with a lady known as Mrs. Cameron, are you not?"

"None of your business."

"I know that you are."

"Then why do you ask me the question?"

"I wish to proceed in a regular manner, that's all."

"All your proceedings have been very regular to-night."

"What is your game in engaging with Mrs. Cameron as a French girl who can not speak English, when you are as glib as a Yankee girl?"

"None of your business."

"You are not courteous, madame," said the man, in a mocking tone.

"I do not know that your underhand kidnapping of my person entitles you to courteous treatment."

"We will drop this comedy-play, madame, and come down to business."

"You are stage-manager, order on what you please."

"You may never leave this house; it may prove your tomb."

"Indeed! But that is a clean leap to the tragic."

"You will change your tone in a moment."

"Have we not already changed from comedy to tragedy?"

"In plain words, madame, I know your little game!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and now I want to know first what you are up to?"

"I thought you knew."

"Who employs you?"

"Employs me for what?"

"To act as a spy on the movements of Mrs. Cameron?"

"None of your business."

"You may as well answer me at once."

"When you know my game so well, why do you ask so many questions?"

"Simply because I mean to get answers to my questions, if I wring them from your throat."

"You threaten, eh?"

"I do; and now who employs you as a spy on the movements of Mrs. Cameron?"

"I am not acting as a spy on the movements of Mrs. Cameron."

"You are."

"I am not!"

"It is useless for you to attempt to deceive me, I tell you."

"You have deceived yourself; I am acting as a spy on the movements of some one else."

"Who?"

"*Mr.* Cameron."

CHAPTER XV.

A MASKER MATCHED.

THE masked man recoiled, as though something fearful had suddenly been revealed to him.

"Great Heaven!" he ejaculated; "what does the woman mean?"

"I mean to follow my fancy."

"And what is your fancy?"

"To answer some of your questions; and it appears that my first answer does not sit well on your stomach."

"By heavens! you will come down from your high horse in a moment!"

"All right!"

"I think the best thing I can do is to dungeon you for awhile!"

"I wouldn't try it, if I were you."

"Why are you spying upon Mr. Cameron?"

"That is my business."

"I may as well tell you that Mr. Cameron is a friend in whom I am greatly interested."

"Yes; you are more interested in Mr. Cameron than any one else, so pull off your mask, as that little matter is perfectly plain."

"What little matter?"

"Your interest in Mr. Cameron."

"What do you know about Mr. Cameron?"

"Do you suppose I have been watching him so long without 'piping' him well enough to penetrate a flimsy mask?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am talking to Mr. Cameron; so pull off your mask, and meet me face to face, and may be we will get along better."

"Curse you for a she-devil! who are you?"

"The French maid!"

"See here, woman, I see that you're no ordinary person, and that you have some game."

"I thought you knew my game?" came the taunt, in a satirical tone.

The man paid no heed to the taunt, but continued, "You must be paid for your game. Now listen to me; I will give you five thousand dollars right here, this moment, to betray your employer."

"That's plain talk."

"I mean to talk plain."

"Then you must meet me on an equality."

"In what manner?"

"Conduct me to the carriage waiting below, and meet me when I come voluntarily."

"What is the difference?"

"I do not like your present mode of procedure; it's a little too summary."

The masked man was silent a moment, but at length said:

"You will drive me to violence."

"You had better not attempt it."

"Now, then, will you listen to my proposition?"

"I will not, scoundrel!"

"Then, by Heaven, I'll compel you to answer all my questions."

"Do so, if you can!"

The masked man was a tall, powerful individual, and he suddenly leaped forward, and caught the woman by the wrists.

"Unhand me, sir!"

A struggle ensued.

A groan burst from the masked man's lips; the powerful man writhed and struggled in the hands of the small and delicate woman.

At length, pale and fainting, he fell to the floor.

The woman released her hold upon him, and drawing a pocket-handkerchief, saturated it from a bottle, and held the silk to the man's nostrils.

The latter's eyes closed, and he stiffened out upon the floor like a dead man.

The woman coolly left the room and descended the stairs.

The hall was dimly lighted, and she walked down slowly, taking a keen survey of her surroundings as she descended.

She had just opened the door to go out, when a man presented himself.

"Hold! you are not to go," he said.

"Oh, yes, I am!"

"But what will my master say about it?"

"He told me what to say to you."

"What did he tell you to say to me?"

"He told me to say this to you," and the bold, cool woman clapped her handkerchief right in the man's face.

The latter uttered a cry and fell back.

Kate Goelet passed through the door-way and descended toward the carriage, still standing under the arch.

"Are you there?" she said to the driver.

"Yes, madame."

"All right; you drive to the city, and you attempt to play treacherously and you will rue it. Whatever money the owner of this house paid you for your little game you can keep, and I'll say nothing about it; but try any more capers, and you will be in trouble."

"Look yer, madame; the man who hired me to drive you here deceived me, I reckon."

"What story did he tell you?"

"He told me you were his wife, that you were off on a little lark, and that he wanted to get square by a little lark on the other side. I meant no harm, only went into the joke."

"Have you been paid?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"All right! let her go! Take me to the spot where I first engaged you."

"All right, madame. You can depend upon me now, you bet!"

The carriage drove away, and in a few minutes the man at the door got up and ran upstairs to the room where the masked man lay upon the floor.

The latter had just recovered from the effects of the dose that had been administered from the handkerchief.

The servant raised his master to his feet, removed the mask, and disclosed the pale, marble face of Mr. Cameron, the banker.

"Oh, sir!" he cried, in terror, "are you murdered?"

"No, no! Where is that woman?"

"Gone, sir!"

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you let her go?"

"Why, sir, she nearly smothered me! See here, master, I've a suspicion."

"What is your suspicion?"

"I don't believe that was a woman at all!"

"What was it, then?" asked Mr. Cameron, as he proceeded to examine his wounds.

"It was a man!"

"Nonsense! It was a woman; and by Heaven, I'll match her yet! But next time I will be prepared for her."

Mr. Cameron found that his wrists had been badly lacerated, but that he was not seriously injured.

CHAPTER XVI.

DARK SUSPICIONS.

WHILE the scenes previously recorded were in progress, Mrs. Cameron was carrying on her investigations concerning the strange disappearance of the mysterious French maid.

The girl had come to her with absolutely no baggage, and a search in every nook and corner failed to discover the least trace of anything tending to convict her of treachery.

Her mysterious absence was the only clew against her.

"Well, well, miss, when you make your appearance tomorrow, with your pretty little French airs and simperings, I reckon I will force the truth out of you."

"Suppose she does not come?" again thought the woman, and in audible tones she muttered:

"The creature has not left even a rag behind her. I fear that she has forestalled me by taking 'French leave.'"

Mrs. Cameron retired to her bed, and on the following morning, at the usual hour, the French maid put in an appearance.

A dark frown settled upon Mrs. Cameron's face, and in good plain English she said:

"Well, miss, you have dared to show your treacherous face here again, have you?"

The French maid shook her head, and said, in French:

"Madame forgets; I do not understand."

"You do not understand, eh? well, I know better; you do understand; you were out of this house last night, and now I want to know just where you were all the time."

The maid stood mute.

"You might as well answer me, you understand me well enough."

The maid still made no response.

"I tell you, you vixen, that your employer, Mr. Cameron, has been compelled to confess that he sent you into this house to act as a spy over me!"

The girl still answered not.

Mrs. Cameron rose from her bed, and allowed the maid to assist her in robing.

After partaking of her coffee, the lady quietly proceeded, and locked every door leading from the room.

The maid was a witness of these strange movements, but appeared as quiet and demure as ever.

Having closed and locked all the doors, Mrs. Cameron said, as a glitter shone in her eyes and her face assumed the pallor of suppressed rage.

"Now, then, miss, you and I will come to an understanding!"

In French the maid asked:

"Is madame unwell, or what does she say?"

The madame now spoke in French, and said:

"You understand me well enough in English; but, as you are determined to cling to your little deceit, I will address you in a language that you admit understanding; and now I want to know where you were last night."

"I can not tell the madame."

"You can not tell me, eh? Well, I will see whether you will tell me or not! I want you to understand that your little game has been exposed. Mr. Cameron last night was compelled to confess that he procured your admission into this house, and that a perfect understanding exists between you and him."

"If Mr. Cameron made any such confession, madame, he told what is untrue. I never exchanged a word with Mr. Cameron except in this house."

"It is useless for you to tell any more falsehoods. You may be a smart, cunning woman, but you will find I am a match for you."

"I have nothing to tell madame of any collusion with Mr. Cameron, even though she kills me."

"Listen! I will give you one chance. Mr. Cameron does not employ you without promising you money. Now, then, no matter how great his reward may be, I will pay you just double the amount if you will leave his service and enter mine."

"I tell you, madame, that I am not in Mr. Cameron's service."

"And I tell you that I know you are!"

"I can say no more, madame."

"Remember, I warned you."

"I can say no more."

"One moment. Did you understand that I would pay you three times the amount promised you by Mr. Cameron, if you will betray him?"

"I can not betray him. I have nothing to betray."

Mrs. Cameron decided to change her tactics.

She was a cunning woman, and a determined foe.

"If you are innocent, forgive me."

A few moments' silence followed.

Mrs. Cameron was a large, powerful woman physically, and thinking that she had been fooled, she still resolved to force a confession from her maid.

Suddenly she rushed across the room, and attempted to seize the French girl.

A struggle ensued.

Again was Mrs. Cameron baffled; the slender, gracefully formed maid appeared to possess muscles of steel, combined with most extraordinary activity and strength.

She prevented her assailant from catching her by the throat, and pinioning her hands, held her writhing in impotent fury.

In the midst of the strange scene above described, there came a knock at the door.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Cameron, "who can it be? Release me, girl!"

In French, the maid said:

"Madame, I came to you poor, and you gave me a home. I would have been a friend to you; now I must leave you. Remember I am in your service no longer; and, believe me, I never was in the service of Mr. Cameron; I know no more of him than I have learned since I lived in this house."

Mrs. Cameron appeared convinced, and she exclaimed:

"You must forgive me. And I pray you do not leave my service; and if that should prove to be Mr. Cameron at the door, do not let him know what has transpired between us."

"Madame can rely upon me that I will be silent."

The doors were unlocked, and the one leading to the hall opened, when Mr. Cameron entered.

The latter had his wrists bound with cloths and flannels, and his face was pale.

The French maid started to leave the room, when Mr. Cameron said, hastily, to his wife:

"Do not let that vile creature leave the room. I wish to ask you some questions in her presence."

Mrs. Cameron was bewildered; she did not know exactly how to act under the circumstances, but she said:

"I can summon her after you have offered me some explanation of your strange request, Mr. Cameron."

"I command you to keep that girl in the room!"

There was a decision in Mr. Cameron's tone that the lady had never before observed.

"I can call her," she repeated.

With a violent oath, Mr. Cameron exclaimed:

"Keep her here, I say; do you understand?"

The French girl had started to leave the room at the beginning of the talk, but Mrs. Cameron had bid her remain, and during the above dialogue she had stood with a look of pretty surprise upon her face.

Turning toward her, the man said:

"You deceitful hussy! do you see those wrists?"

Mrs. Cameron uttered a cry of amazement, when her assumed husband, addressing her, said:

"I warned you in the beginning that you had a spy in your house. That girl was out all night past, was she not?"

"I do not understand you!" answered Mrs. Cameron, who had begun to see the dawning of certain startling revelations.

"Yes, you do understand. I tell you that schemer there was out of the house all night!"

"And I tell you," answered Mrs. Cameron, "that she was not outside the door last night."

CHAPTER XVII.

EXPLANATIONS.

A DARK scowl overspread Mr. Cameron's face, supplemented with a look of perplexity as he said:

"How do you know she was not out all night?"

"Simply because I was not well last night, and she slept with me," answered Mrs. Cameron, with the utmost coolness.

The man was completely bewildered.

He knew no reason why his wife should make a misstatement, and yet he felt assured that he had seen the French maid at a certain entertainment the night before, and later at a certain house by the river-side.

If the woman he had procured to be conveyed to that house was not the French maid, who then could she be?

Mr. Cameron ordered the woman to let the girl leave the room.

He then sat down and calmly related all that had occurred.

He said that the French girl had a scar just under her plait of front hair, and that upon the previous night, while at the ball, where he had gone to watch the movements of a certain man, he had entered a room just as a female, dressed as a gray nun, had her mask torn aside.

Continuing his statement, Mr. Cameron said:

"When the mask was rudely thrust aside, her front hair was raised, and I saw the same scar on the forehead of the gray nun that I once accidentally saw on the forehead of your French maid."

Mrs. Cameron uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

Suddenly all suspicions concerning Mr. Cameron's collusion with the French maid ceased, and an entirely new idea crossed her mind.

Mr. Cameron proceeded, and told how he had bribed the driver of the gray nun's coach, and had her conveyed to a house belonging to him on the river-side, together with a minute account of the startling scene that occurred in the house.

"Who was the man you were 'piping'?" asked Mrs. Cameron.

"Henry Wilbur."

"And was he the man who tore the mask from the French maid's face?"

"I could not discover, although I have every reason to believe that Wilbur was her companion."

Mrs. Cameron now owned up that the French maid had been out all the night before, and went on and stated how she had been led to believe that the girl was a spy set over her by Mr. Cameron.

"Why should I wish to set a spy over you?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"Well, you know, dear, all men are so jealous, and I thought that possibly you had become infected, and the thought maddened me, and I denied the absence of the girl, supposing that you were only trying to throw dust in my eye."

"As I live, I never saw that mysterious creature until I met her in this house; and from the first I suspected her honesty."

"What do you suppose is her motive? Why should she come to spy over me?"

"I do not believe that she is a spy over you."

"Who, then?"

"Myself."

"Great Heaven! for what purpose?"

"Those bonds."

"Who could employ her?"

"Henry Wilbur."

"Do you suppose he has any suspicion of the truth?"

"We can not tell; but one thing is certain, that French girl is a fraud, and is here for some purpose inimical to our interests."

A dead silence followed this last remark.

Gradually a dark look stole over Mrs. Cameron's face, and at length, in a low tone, she said:

"I am sorry we let the girl know we suspected her."

"Why?"

"It will place her on her guard."

"You can drive her from your house."

"That would never do."

"Would you keep her here to watch us?"

"No."

"What would you do then?"

"She knows too much already."

"That is what I fear."

"That woman must be hushed somehow," remarked Cameron—and, after some further talk, these two wicked conspirators separated.

They were in dire alarm, and, as a matter of course, one crime had hurried them on to another.

Before the conversation above recorded had taken place, Mrs. Cameron had made sure, as she supposed, that no one could overhear.

In fact, both had spoken in such a subdued whisper, that one standing in the room could not have distinctly heard what was being said.

Once aroused, they were cunning; but there was one they had to deal with still more cunning, and, despite their low whispering, every word that they spoke was distinctly overheard.

A cunning scientific little instrument had been inserted in the key-hole, and an ear, keen and sensitive, was at the other end of it.

Mrs. Cameron came into the room where the French girl was sitting, immediately after the departure of Mr. Cameron.

The woman was as soft and kind in her manner as the low soughing of the breeze just before the outbreak of the coming tempest.

The matter had been reduced down to a desperate game of cunning between two bold and wily women.

That same afternoon, at dinner, Mrs. Cameron pressed the French maid to drink a cup of tea.

The latter declined, when once more Mrs. Cameron, seeing that she was baffled, lost her temper, and accused the maid of understanding English, and of having been an "eavesdropper;" and upon the inspiration of the moment she also accused her servant of having stolen a sum of money.

When this latter charge was made, a peculiar smile came to the French girl's face.

The latter had been waiting for a good excuse to resign her situation, and at once announced that she should go away.

The announcement had just been made, when again the conversation between the two women was interrupted by a rap at the door.

Mrs. Cameron hastened to open the door, and ushered in the rowdy and bully, Dick Coulter.

The appearance of the latter at once inspired the enraged woman with courage, and she told the French maid that she should not leave the house until she had submitted to a search for the missing money.

The girl positively refused to submit to a search, and proceeded to her own room to make arrangements for her departure.

Mrs. Cameron improved the interval of her absence by telling Dick Coulter all she suspected.

The man listened with eyes distended with astonishment, and finally he said:

"That gal can cut us out of a fortune!"

"She can."

"See here, my good gal, are you game?"

"How do you mean?"

"The folks who dwell in this house, all beside yourself, are out of town!"

"No; there is a family on the first-floor."

"A family on the first-floor?"

"Yes."

"Never mind; we can work it."

"You must remember one thing: that girl, if your suspicions are true, must have confederates who would raise a row should she be missing."

"It will not disturb us how much row they make, if you are only a game woman. You know we are playing for a million; if that gal goes abroad, our game is up! Now, then, the question is, shall we play on or give up beat?"

The woman was silent a few moments, but at length she said, in a low, husky tone:

"Dick, we can not lose our game, when it is so near played out."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE.

DICK COULTER was a man who had traveled all over the world, and everywhere that he had been he had always associated with the criminal classes, and he had learned every little device known to criminals.

Mrs. Cameron went to the door of the French maid's room, and called her.

No answer came to the summons, and Mrs. Cameron called again.

The woman's voice was husky, and a look of terror rested upon her pale face, while within the adjoining room Dick Coulter waited.

Mrs. Cameron rapped at the door and called in a louder tone, and, as no answer came, she returned to the room where her companion was, and said:

"I can get no answer from her."

"If she has 'sloped,' we are gone up!" said the man.

"She has not gone; she could not pass out of that room without our knowing it."

"Then you wait here, and I will go into her room."

Trembling from head to foot, Mrs. Cameron threw herself into a chair, and Coulter went to the door of the girl's room.

He tried the knob; it yielded, and he pushed open the door.

There was sufficient light reflected from a gas-burner in the hall for him to see plainly about the room.

It was unoccupied—the bird had flown.

Kate Goelet had overheard sufficient, and having nothing particular to gain by remaining in that dangerous proximity, she determined to leave.

The astonishment and chagrin of the two was great, and their terror also began to increase.

Dick Coulter was smart enough to know that the mysterious French girl was in disguise, and his first exclamation was,

"We're ruined!"

"Not quite," answered Mrs. Cameron. "We will hunt up that girl."

"No, no, you will never see her again as the French girl; she has been in this house in disguise!"

"Mr. Cameron recognized her, however, and so can I whenever and wherever I see her!"

"All right! hunt her down and the advantage is in our hands; but as it is, we are in danger every moment."

A week passed. During that time, Kate Goelet had occupied her quarters in the house a few doors distant from where Mrs. Cameron resided.

The latter had boasted that she would know the girl wherever she saw her, when in fact she had seen her a dozen times, and had failed to recognize her.

The lady detective had "dropped" to the scar identification mark, and had fixed that so that it would take sharper eyes than Mrs. Cameron's to discover it.

In the meantime Kate Goelet had several times met Henry Wilbur.

She was not deceived, concerning the truth; she had charmed the young man, and he loved her, and yet she was not happy.

Sitting alone in her room one day, she indulged her thoughts by audible expression of them.

"He loves me now," she soliloquized, "although he knows that there is some mystery surrounding me, but he is a refined and delicate-minded man. What will his feelings be when he learns that I am the famous lady detective When he learns the person who he supposed was an unsophisticated girl is a woman, who, from necessity, has penetrated amidst all manner of scenes of vice and crime?"

Kate Goelet was a beautiful woman, and not by half as old as she, in her self-accusing mood, would make it appear.

Although she had become famous as a detective under an assumed name, she was really but twenty-five summers old.

As intimated in our opening chapters, she was a child of destiny.

At last, during her career, she had met a man whom she loved, and she had gained that man's love under false pretenses, and now she feared that, when the truth became known, he would despise her, and treat her with contempt and scorn—even worse—absolute hatred, for having deceived him.

She felt that when that hour came she would wish to die.

Kate Goelet was a woman of intense feeling, and as the hours sped by her passion increased, and her fears and dread of the result of the final discovery grew apace also.

One day the lady detective and Henry Wilbur were strolling in the park together.

Henry had noticed that his companion was strangely sad.

She had told him her name was Kate, and, calling her by that name in an endearing tone, he said:

"You are sad and silent to-day?"

"Yes; I have been thinking about you."

"And should thoughts about me make you sad?"

"Yes."

"Why, darling?"

"You have professed to love me."

"I do love you with all my heart."

"You have made the profession without having heard my true story."

"I care not about your true story."

"I fear you do not believe me when I tell you I am a person of humble origin."

The young man turned and caught Kate's hand; his fine handsome eyes glowed with a noble enthusiasm as he exclaimed:

"Kate, you are beautiful, and pure, and truthful! I ask no more! You have often hinted that some disclosure might cause my love to vanish! Now, darling, listen to me; as long as I know that you are a pure woman, I care not whether your father was a ragpicker! I love you for yourself, and not for your estate!"

"You may lose all your enthusiasm when the truth is told, and your love is put to the test."

"You are putting my love to the test now, more severely than I deserve."

The two young people had strolled away from the frequented part of the park, and had wandered off to a lonely spot.

Little did either of them dream, while indulging their fond talk, that a pair of keen-eyed, strong-limbed, determined men were sneaking close upon their heels, and watching their movements.

A few moments Henry had been lost in deep thought, but at length he broke the silence by saying:

"Kate, you may not be the only one who has a disclosure to make."

"What do you mean, Henry?"

"I mean that at any moment I may be brought into disgrace. The sword of Damocles is hanging over my head, and may fall at any moment. If it were not so, I should urge our immediate marriage."

"You are threatened with disgrace?"

"Yes."

"Of what nature?"

"At any moment I may be accused of a terrible crime."

"But you are innocent?"

"As innocent as yourself!"

A moment Kate was silent, then, in a voice "full of tears," she said:

"No matter what may come, Henry, I will trust you as I have trusted you; and I believed in you from the first. And—"

At this moment two men burst through the hedge and advanced toward them.

Henry at once thought that he was waylaid by highwaymen, and he drew his pistol with the exclamation "*Robbers.*"

Kate laid her hand on his arm, and said:

"Put up your pistol."

A strange look came over his face, and he exclaimed, in a husky voice:

"Oh, Kate! Are you the confederate of—"

Kate Goelet raised her hand warningly, and only said:

"*Hush!*"

CHAPTER XIX.

OLD REBECCA BROWN AGAIN.

OUR readers will recollect that Henry Wilbur had met Kate Goelet under strange circumstances.

Her face was beautiful, and bore the impress of truth and virtue, and yet she had remained a mystery to him as far as her standing in society was concerned.

The fact that they had wandered far from the frequented paths, and the sudden springing forth of the two men, led Henry to think on the spur of the moment, as though a sudden revelation had burst upon his mind, that, after all, he had been played as the mere dupe of a charming adventuress and possible criminal.

In a few brief seconds the human mind can pass, lightning-like, though a number of startling emotions, and in those few brief seconds Henry Wilbur experienced astonishment, rage, and a sudden hatred.

He was under the firm impression that the two men were common foot-pads, and that Kate was the accomplice who had lured him to a convenient spot for the purpose of robbery.

In a few seconds, however, his emotions changed completely, and as, in a despairing manner, he gazed at Kate, it was to implore her pardon for the foul suspicion that he had permitted to cross his mind.

One of them stepped forward toward our hero, while the other covered him with a pistol.

"Is your name Henry Wilbur?" came the question.

"That is my name."

"You are my prisoner."

"Your prisoner?"

"Exactly."

"On what charge?"

"Robbery."

"There must be some mistake."

"Oh, yes!" laughed one of the detectives, "there is always a mistake made when we make an arrest."

"Who prefers the charge against me?" asked Henry.

"I have nothing to do with that, young man; all I have to do is to take you to the Tombs, and if you offer any resistance, it will be all the worse for you."

"Innocent men have no reason for offering resistance to the law; I am your prisoner."

The detective produced a pair of handcuffs.

"Oh, not those!" exclaimed Henry, with a shudder. "I will go quietly with you!"

"All right, my friend; if you are innocent, your arrest will only be a momentary inconvenience; and if you are guilty—well, so much the worse for you!"

"Can I speak in private to this lady one moment?"

The officers exchanged glances.

There was one terrible contingency they had to fear—suicide.

"You can speak to her on one condition—you must first submit to a search."

Kate stepped forward at this moment, seeing the blush of shame on Henry's cheek, and she said, in a strong, confident voice:

"Never mind speaking to me now, Henry; I will visit you at once. And remember, no matter what the charge, or by whom made, I have perfect confidence in your innocence, and the same confidence that it will be speedily proved; so keep up good courage, for *my* sake!"

"By George! you need have no fears; I'll prove my innocence if I have to pass through the tortures of hell in doing so!"

Two hours later and Henry Wilbur was in the Tombs.

The morning following, the news of the great robbery was spread abroad.

Five of the stolen bonds had been negotiated, and finally had been offered to a banking-house who had recognized them as part of the stolen bonds.

They were traced back from one possessor to another, until the man was found who had first put them upon the market.

The last individual stated that he had received them from a man, whose appearance he described, and an hour later the detectives had arrested Dick Coulter.

The latter when arrested was perfectly cool, and asserted his innocence, claiming that he had secured the bonds in good faith from one of the most respectable banking-houses in the city.

During further revelations, he admitted that the bonds had been given to him to be disposed of by Henry Wilbur, a clerk in the house of Attry, Comstock & Co., and that he had been led to believe that the transaction was perfectly regular and legitimate.

The banking-house named was communicated with, and they at once declared that the bonds were portion of a million dollars' worth that had been stolen from them.

A warrant was at once sworn out, and Henry Wilbur was arrested as stated.

The trick to fasten the robbery upon Henry Wilbur had been most coolly and cunningly carried out.

The district attorney had expressed himself as considering it one of the deadest cases he had ever had to prosecute.

The detectives were lauded to the skies as usual for their acuteness and promptness in making the arrest, and it looked as though the chances were set for Henry Wilbur to go to Sing Sing for the remainder of his natural life.

Upon the day following Henry's arrest, a strange-looking old woman presented herself at the Tombs with a permit to see the prisoner.

As the permit was from head-quarters, the strange-looking old creature was admitted.

As she was shown into the cell, her first exclamation was: "Well, sakes alive, young man, how could you go and do such an awful thing as to steal your employer's money?"

Our hero recognized the old woman as the mysterious Rebecca Brown who had done him such a wonderful service.

The moment the keeper had gone beyond ear-shot, the old woman changed her tone, and said, in a quick, earnest manner:

"Well, it's come; but do not be discouraged. You shall be brought out all right. The rogues have played a deep game, but a deeper game has been played against them!"

"Who are you?" asked Henry.

"You remember me?"

"I do."

"Well, then, you know who I am, and what my purpose is; I am on the track of the real robber."

"You may be on the *track* of the real robber, but before you catch the real robber, I may be convicted."

"You will never be convicted; you can take things as easy as you choose on that score."

"I am very thankful to you for the interest you have shown in my case, but you may be overhopeful."

"I could open your prison-door inside of twelve hours, if I thought proper; but you must remember that you promised to aid me in recovering those bonds."

"I will keep my promise."

"Then you must rest quietly in prison until the proper moment arrives for opening your prison doors."

"Why not at once?"

"I could put my hand on the real thief to-day, but not upon the bonds; I must recover them."

"Have you any hope of succeeding?"

"I have."

"How soon?"

"Possibly within a few hours, or a few days at most."

"I have no need to employ counsel?"

"No."

"I have been overrun with men offering their services."

"As a matter of course, they think a million dollar bond-robber must have plenty of money."

"Will you do me one favor?" asked Henry.

"What is it?"

"Go and see my mother."

"I saw your mother within two hours after your arrest."

"Mysterious woman! how did you know of my arrest so soon?"

"I was expecting that you would be arrested; I knew that the game of the conspirators against you was ripe for the final drop, as they thought it."

"I owe my life and my honor to you."

"Well, you can pay me some day," remarked the lady detective, in a strange, sad tone.

"I may pay you some day?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Well, I may have something to ask of you."

"Whatever you ask, if it be in my power to grant it, it shall be so."

"Do not make a rash promise."

"I swear it!"

"Give me some pledge that you will keep your word."

It was a moment when Henry was filled with gratitude; it may be that a suspicion crossed his mind as to what the request might be, as he was aware that the appearance of an old woman was a disguise, and that his strange benefactor was young and comely; yet from his hand he drew a ring, and, handing it to her, said:

"I am not a king, to remind myself of a royal promise by the token of a ring, but I am a man of honor, and as you have only appeared to me in disguise, I present this with a reminder of my promise, and I'll not fail my word."

Receiving the ring, the lady detective said:

"Having settled our little romance, we will attend to business."

The detective had commenced asking a few questions, when the prison-keeper appeared at the door, accompanied by a gentleman.

The visitor was a member of the firm that had suffered such a heavy robbery—none other than Mr. Cameron.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE LION'S DEN.

A low, startled exclamation burst from the old lady's lips, and at the same moment she said:

"Well, well, young man, I am sorry that you were tempted of the devil to commit so great a crime; and I hope it will be a lesson to other evil-doers."

The old lady started to leave the cell, when Mr. Cameron fixed a glance upon her so fearful in its import that even the keeper was induced to inquire:

"Do you know that woman, sir? Is she one of the outside gang?"

"No, no," answered Mr. Cameron; and, after a moment, he added: "I do not think I could bear seeing this young man at this moment. I thought more of him than any one in our employ, and his downfall has caused me the greatest sorrow; I will defer my visit."

Mr. Cameron turned to follow the old woman.

A startling recollection, and a no less startling suspicion, had flashed across his mind.

He lived in constant dread of some sudden and awful exposure; he would have given half the proceeds of his great crime to have known that the mysterious French maid was in the East River.

He did not feel that he was safe as long as that cute, mysterious being was moving above ground.

A hint of the real truth concerning her identity had taken possession of his mind, and at that very moment, in order to cover one crime, he was prepared to commit another.

The old woman passed from the gloomy prison, and, upon descending the great stone steps in Center Street, started down town.

A few squares, and she wheeled about and walked toward the river.

Mr. Cameron was close upon her heels.

The desperate man had resolved upon a desperate expedient should an opportunity offer.

The old lady reached South Street, and passed over and entered the Roosevelt ferry-house.

Mr. Cameron followed a moment later, and was just in time to see his game enter the ladies' waiting-room.

The man took up a position, determined to wait until she came forth again.

Not more than a minute had passed since seeing the old lady enter the waiting-room, when a young and neatly dressed lady came forth.

Ten minutes passed, and the party for whom Mr. Cameron was waiting did not come out.

It was an hour of the day when there were but few passengers.

Mr. Cameron began to grow weary, and advanced to the window of the waiting-room and peeped in.

There was no one in the room.

The man began to grow uneasy, and then a most daring scheme flashed across his mind.

He sneaked into the ladies' waiting-room, and, rapidly crossing, actually peered into a quarter where he had no business; but he saw no one.

The place was totally deserted—in some strange and mysterious manner the bird had flown, and he had been fooled once again.

He then remembered the young lady who had come forth so soon after the entrance of the supposed old one, and, with a curse, he muttered:

"Somebody kick Injun for a fool!"

He was now satisfied that he was playing against a detective—a female detective, one of the most wily and cunning women, as he believed, in existence.

In the meantime, Kate Goelet, who always went prepared to make just such wonderful transformations in her appearance, got well away, and commenced preparations to carry out a most daring scheme.

The lady detective was satisfied in her own mind that the bonds were concealed in the house to which Mr. Cameron had had her conveyed on the night of the masquerade.

As our readers know, she had in reserve evidence of Mr. Cameron's guilt sufficient to have released Henry Wilbur; but she had an idea that by letting the young man remain in prison, with every prospect of ultimate conviction, his enemies would become less guarded, and she would have a chance to pounce down upon the booty.

There were reasons why the lady detective wished to secure the large reward dependent upon the finding of the bonds.

As many times hinted, she had a secret in her life, and she felt that the hour was approaching when her whole destiny would be changed.

A week passed.

During the interval Henry Wilbur had been arraigned, and had pleaded not guilty to the charge against him.

Mr. Comstock and Mr. Cameron had called upon him in company, and the latter, with a coolness most remarkable, had hinted that there might be some chance for Henry's release, if he would surrender the stolen bonds.

Little did Mr. Comstock dream of the actual coolness of his partner's proposition, but the day was fast approaching when he would fully realize the stupendous villainy of the man whom at the moment he considered the soul of honor.

One night, as stated, after a week had passed, a slenderly formed man, about midnight, might have been seen, mounted on a swift horse, riding along the road leading to Mr. Cameron's mysterious country residence.

On the afternoon of the day preceding the excursion of the mysterious horseman, Mr. Cameron had received a singular note, which read as follows:

"Mr. Cameron,—Sir: You appear to think that I had some design in becoming a servant to the woman who in public bears your name.

"Frankly you were right in your suspicion. I have a most extraordinary revelation to make to you. You are being 'played for an angel.' I expect to be paid for the services I may render you, but you will find it a great service, while necessity demands that our meeting should be a secret one; meet me at No. — S—— Street, and I will open your eyes to a little scheme wherein it is intended that the 'second thief shall be the best owner.' Do not fail to come, at your peril. From this note you will see that I am 'upon points' necessary to your safety.

"As I am watched, you will have to time your visit so as to reach the house named about two o'clock in the morning; and should you fear bodily harm, you can take any precautions you choose, even to the bringing of an officer with you; but it is necessary, I repeat, for your own safety, that you do not fail to be on hand.

"Yours, in haste,

"The French Maid.

"P.S.—They are working to 'blow' in the real bond-thief after 'raking in the swag.' F. M."

As the mysterious rider rode along, he muttered to himself:

"Cameron will not fail to attend the mandate of the letter, the road will all be clear for me. While he is looking for the French maid, I will be looking for the bonds."

It was after one o'clock in the morning when the horseman picketed his animal to the fence surrounding the residence of Mr. Cameron.

As our readers have ere this surmised, the midnight rider was the lady detective disguised as the little French maid.

Having secured her horse, Kate leaped the fence and stole along across the lawn toward the house.

The building was an ordinary summer villa, with heavy porticoed balconies and verandas, and bay windows at every story.

Our heroine passed round to one of the bay windows, and opening a small bag that she carried, disclosed quite an assortment of burglars' tools.

With the readiness and skill of an expert burglar, she pried open one of the windows, and in as agile a manner as a gymnast, raised herself from the ground, crept through the raised window and stood within the parlor.

She had a stout cord attached to her bag of tools, and when once in the room, she drew it up, selected a number of articles, and disposed them about her person.

The brave woman was prepared for any sort of interruption, and moving stealthily across the parlor, passed out into the broad hall, and, as noiselessly as a cat, ascended the stairs toward the second story.

The lady detective proved her remarkable powers of observation, by proceeding direct to the room where she had held that memorable interview with Mr. Cameron on a former occasion.

At the time she had been a forced visitor in the house, and yet in the few brief moments when leaving the house at that time, she had taken in the whole plan of the interior.

She turned to the knob of the door, and found that it was locked.

From her pocket she drew a cunningly contrived instrument, and had just inserted it in the lock, when she was startled by hearing a succession of heart-rending and piercing shrieks.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN APPARITION.

Kate Goelet possessed a wonderfully cool, strong nerve, and yet those screams, so piercing and so suddenly falling upon her ear, for the instant unnerved her.

It was a woman's voice she heard, and the screams proceeded from some room in the house. Kate stood and listened, but a dead silence had followed the first most extraordinary noise.

"Another mystery, and more villainy!" reflected the lady detective.

She had other business on hand, however, just at that moment, and again directed her attention toward gaining an entrance into the room.

It took her but a moment to spring the lock-bolt and gain an entrance.

Once in the room, she drew a masked lantern from her pocket, lit it, and, raising it aloft, let the bright ray of light shoot on different objects as she took a deliberate survey of the room.

"There is no escritoire here where the stolen bonds could be concealed. We will try the next room," she murmured.

The door leading into the adjoining room was unlocked.

The lady detective passed through, and found herself in a sleeping-room.

An elegant bedstead stood in one corner of the large apartment, and other toilet furniture of the most gorgeous description.

The article that most pleased the eyes of our heroine, however, was a heavily carved desk.

Crossing to the latter, she made a most thorough examination of it, and, when fully satisfied, set about exploring its interior.

A pleased smile was on the detective's face, as she felt around, that at last her efforts were to be rewarded with the most satisfactory success.

Knowing what she was to encounter, she was provided with the proper instruments, and, understanding her business, she soon had the desk open.

A most exact and thorough examination followed.

She found an abundance of papers, and some of value, but not the least sign of the missing bonds.

An hour passed, and the lady detective was just despairing of success, and had determined to replace every article back in the desk and resume her search in some other direction, when she was startled by hearing a light footfall.

Less keen ears than her own would have failed to detect the approaching step, so light was the tread.

In an instant the slide of the masked lantern was shut to its place, and the lady detective sought a place of concealment behind the heavy folds of the curtains hanging across the bay window alcove.

She was not a moment too soon, and had but just concealed herself, and secured a position from whence she could peep forth, when a most extraordinary and astounding apparition met her gaze.

A female, dressed in a loose wrapper, with long, blonde hair stealing down to her waist, entered the room with a slow measured tread.

The female's face was beautiful, but pale and death-like, and her eyes glared in a preternatural manner.

In one hand she carried a light, the rays of which she carefully shaded as she peered over toward the bedstead standing in the far corner of the large apartment.

In fact the latter was so large, and the bed was standing so in the shadow, that, from where the strangely appearing female stood, it would have been impossible for any one to have seen whether it was occupied or not without approaching to within a few feet of it.

The strange, weird creature stood the lamp upon the floor in a corner.

A cold chill stole over the lady detective's form.

It was plain that the woman had a desperate purpose.

The chill of horror, however, passed off with the recollection that the bed was unoccupied.

A most strange and wonderful coincidence was it, however, that, in fooling Mr. Cameron to an absence from his home upon that particular night, she had most probably saved him from being assassinated in his bed.

The woman stole on tiptoe across the room toward the bed.

A moment she stood and gazed, when a fierce exclamation burst from her lips, followed by a low wail.

The lady detective was amazed at the singular scene occurring before her, but was cute enough to guess the true story.

The victim of a villain was seeking revenge after years of wrong and suffering.

Was the poor creature insane? was the question suggested to the lady detective.

The woman was beautiful and youthful.

A moment passed, and the weird woman turned and walked toward the corner where she had left her lamp.

Our heroine glanced keenly at her face.

It had a strange expression, and was worn with sorrow and evident suffering; but the bright, strangely staring eyes, despite their singular expression, appeared to reflect the thoughts of a sane soul.

A desperate idea was suggested to the detective.

If this beautiful desperate woman could kill the man who had wronged her, she could not be his friend.

Kate Goelet uttered a low "Hist!"

The woman stopped and listened.

The detective stepped forth.

Our readers will remember that the detective was disguised in the habiliments of a man.

As she stepped forth Kate raised her fingers to her lips and motioned silence.

The woman did not appear either surprised or frightened, and consequently made no outcry.

The detective moved toward her, when the woman raised her hand in a menacing manner, and asked:

"Who are you, and what are you doing in this room?"

The question was asked in a low, guarded whisper, showing that the woman was as anxious to avoid discovery as the detective.

"I am an enemy of Mr. Cameron; I am no thief, but he is a villain."

"You must leave the house at once."

"Why?"

"Mr. Cameron is reserved for my vengeance."

"But I can assist you in revenging yourself upon him."

"I want no assistance, and you must depart at once."

"No; I shall remain."

"It will be worse for you."

"Why?"

"I shall give an alarm!"

"One moment; you are a woman?"

"Certainly."

"Mr. Cameron has wronged you."

"How do you know?"

"I have been in this room for half an hour; I saw all your movements since you have been here, and besides, your own mouth betrayed you when you said he was reserved for your vengeance alone."

"The latter is the reason why you must go away; I will protect Mr. Cameron against any *man;* I will warn him of danger."

The lady detective drew close to the woman that had been Cameron's victim, and said, in a low tone:

"Listen, I am a woman like yourself."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"Why tell me that, when I see with my own eyes that you are a man?"

"I am in disguise."

Suddenly a look of fury appeared in the woman's face, and she toyed, in a menacing manner, with her lantern as she asked in a sharp tone:

"Did Cameron ever pretend to love you?"

"No."

"Did you ever pretend to love him?"

"No."

"Why do you wish to revenge yourself upon him?"

"I am not seeking for revenge, but I want to bring him to justice."

"For what crime?"

"A terrible one."

"Is he a murderer?"

"Not that I know of."

"Why do you, a *woman*, seek to bring him to justice? You can not deceive me."

"I am not trying to deceive you."

"Then why are you, a woman, seeking to bring him to justice?"

An idea suddenly struck the detective, and she said:

"I do not love Cameron. I never loved him; I never saw him until during the last few weeks."

"It is easy to deny and assert."

"Let me tell you; I love a brave and noble man, and as handsome as he is noble and brave."

"Well?"

"Cameron is the enemy of my beloved, and he has woven a net-work around an innocent man to make him suffer for a crime he never committed."

"Who is the really guilty man?"

"Cameron."

"And you come to the house to capture him?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"I come to procure evidences of his crime to save the innocent."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"I am."

A moment's silence followed, when the strange woman took up her lamp, and said:

"I think I know what his crime is, and I think I can assist you in the purpose that brought you to this house. Follow me."

The lady detective started to follow the apparition-like looking woman, when a strange incident occurred.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE REVELATION.

As stated in our previous chapter, the lady detective started to follow the apparition-like figure of the woman she had so strangely met, when suddenly her conductress came to a halt and said, in a terrified manner,

"Lay low! the fiends have missed me, and are on my track."

A shade of disappointment flashed over the detective's face.

This strange cry of her conductress appeared as though, after all, she was but following some maniac who had enjoyed but a moment's respite from her ordinary paroxysms of madness.

In an instant, however, the impression was removed.

The woman said:

"I am represented in this house as a mad person, and for a purpose I have favored the idea: you hide and I will surrender myself, throw my keepers off their guard, and then come down here for you again."

The above was spoken in a hurried whisper in the lady detective's ear.

The latter said:

"You may not be able to get away again to come to me."

"You need have no fears; I am not mad, and I can come and go when I please."

The lady detective heard footsteps approaching.

The pretended maniac had extinguished her light on the first alarm, and the two women were standing in total darkness.

"I will await you," said Kate, and she glided from the woman's side.

Half an hour passed, and the waiting detective heard a low, "Hist!"

She stepped forward from her place of concealment and met the woman, who had returned according to promise.

The latter led our heroine up the stairs to an apartment on the attic floor.

A light was burning in the room, and as the lady detective glanced around, she saw every indication of a prison cell.

The windows were barred, and an iron-barred door was inserted inside the door leading from the apartment. Every precaution had been taken to make the place as secure as the most massively constructed prison.

The pretended maniac closed both the wooden and iron doors, and, leading the lady detective to a seat, said:

"I will now tell you my story."

The story listened to by the detective was the old, old narrative of beguilement, betrayal, and wrong.

It is the story whose incidents have occurred since the days of old, and which will occur until the incoming of the millennium.

Florence Clarke was a girl born and bred in the country; an orphan who had been adopted by distant relatives of her mother.

She had been reared as an own child, and had the benefit of the best teachers, so that she became an adept in all the accomplishments peculiar to a young lady's education.

Alas! she had one lesson yet to learn, and that was that the despoiler is ever nigh with flattering tongue to deceive, and false heart to betray.

Florence Clarke met a young man, the confidential clerk in a great banking firm.

He had visited the town where she lived to transact some business with the local banking institution.

From the first moment that the man Cameron met the beautiful Florence, he pretended to be desperately in love with her.

He was a handsome man, of high social position seemingly, and in every way just calculated to attract the fancy and heart of a susceptible girl.

The man remained some weeks in Florence Clarke's native town, and finally declared his love, at the same time cautioning the unsuspecting girl from making his declaration known.

He stated that he was just about to be taken into the firm as a junior partner, and that it might damage his chances if his seniors knew that he was going to be married, as he had reason to know that one of them was very anxious to have him for a son in-law.

It is sufficient to add that by one story and another he finally induced the beautiful Florence to consent to a clandestine marriage.

A number of years followed.

The deceived girl, during all that time, was as one dead to the kind friends who had reared and lavished their affections upon her.

As always happens under similar circumstances, the deceiver at last tired of his victim; then followed slights and faults; at length personal abuse, and finally a cruel confession.

In a moment of rage, George Cameron declared to his supposed wife, Florence, that she was not his wife, that he had a legal wife living at the time he pretended to marry her.

"But my certificate, George?—the ceremony?"

"The first was a forgery; the latter was a farce!"

The victim fell insensible at the deceiver's feet.

When she returned to consciousness, Florence Clarke found herself a prisoner in the room where she sat at the moment while she was telling the sorrowful tale of wrong and injury.

"How long have you been confined in this room?"

"A number of years."

"Have you never sought to escape?"

"I did at first; not lately."

"Does George Cameron ever come to see you?"

"Never."

"Why have you not sought to escape, since you have discovered a means to go from these rooms?"

"Why should I go forth? I would be a homeless wanderer, it is thirteen years since I was beguiled from the home of my guardians."

"What would you have done had you succeeded last night in working out your revenge?"

"I should have killed myself!"

"Then you love this man still?"

"Love him!" exclaimed Florence Clarke as her face assumed a look of fury. "I love him as the bird loves the cobra!"

"Will you let me be your friend?"

"Who are you?"

Kate Goelet explained certain incidents in her career.

The woman listened, and at the conclusion said:

"So George Cameron is a common criminal after all?"

"He is a criminal of the deepest dye."

"You must recover those bonds to convict him?"

"Yes."

"I can assist you."

"How?"

"Come here to-morrow night, and I will tell you; but you must go now. Should you be discovered here, you would be in the greatest danger."

"I am prepared for ruffians," said Kate, in a confident tone.

"Discovery would defeat our plan, and morning draws near."

The two women, thus strangely met, exchanged a few more words, and the lady detective returned to the parlor and made her exit from the house.

She was crossing the lawn, when she suddenly came upon a man, dodging from tree to tree like herself.

The man evidently discovered her presence at the same moment that she had seen him.

He leaped toward her, with a curse and the exclamation:

"Ah! I've got you at last!"

The next instant the man reeled and fell to the ground.

The lady detective had dealt him a blow with a curious sort of instrument that she carried in her hand.

Kate Goelet did not stop to discover who the man was, but pursued her way to where she had picketed her horse.

She found the animal all right, and, mounting, started on her homeward journey just as the first streaks of day began to illumine the eastern sky.

Half a mile from the scene of her night's adventures she met a buggy in which sat a man.

One glance was sufficient—the occupant of the carriage was George Cameron.

On the following morning Henry Wilbur was brought before the judge for a preliminary examination.

He had pleaded "Not guilty," and said that he had nothing to say concerning the charge against him.

The members of the banking firm that had been robbed were present, including Mr. Cameron.

When in the court-room, as the prisoner was being led away, Cameron remarked to his partner, Mr. Comstock:

"It's strange that we have had such a hardened wretch in our employ so long without having suspected his character."

As the man spoke, another voice was heard, saying, in clear, distinct tones:

"It's more strange that Mr. Comstock has had such a hardened villain for a partner for so long a time without having suspected his character."

The two bankers turned, upon hearing the voice, and discovered that no one was standing within ten feet of them.

George Cameron, however, had heard the voice, and at the same moment had observed a female form disappear through the side-door.

"What is the meaning of that?" asked Mr. Comstock.

"I am as much puzzled as you are."

Half an hour later the banker was standing at the door of a low groggery, talking to a pale-faced, slender-formed man.

After talking for some time, the banker turned to walk away, after having remarked:

"Succeed in your work and I will make you a rich man!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOILED AGAIN.

In a previous chapter we intimated that Mr. Cameron was a deep, cunning man.

He had been played against for a long time by a foe hidden in the dark, but at last he had unearthed his antagonist.

On the very day that he had received the note from the pretended French maid, he had been "piping" down the mysterious woman, who, by some secret web-work, had dropped to his true character and crime.

He had hired the services of a detective, and the latter, belonging to that class of the profession who care more for money than honor, had "piped to the facts," and let Mr. Cameron into the knowledge that the French maid was a certain Kate Goelet, a sharp and cunning lady detective.

The officer did not drop to the French maid business, but supplied sufficient data for Mr. Cameron to locate the facts himself.

The banker did not let the male detective know his purpose or fear, but invented a story to account for his interest in the singular woman who had proved herself so inimical to his interests.

It was diamond cut diamond. McGuire, the man employed by Mr. Cameron, was a shrewd, cunning fellow, and he got the points down so fine on the woman, that Mr. Cameron knew just where to put his hand on her for a purpose he had conceived.

His first move was to try bribery, and, in case of failure, he had determined to resort to a most cunning method for removing her from his path.

Kate Goelet, in a most singular manner, had a note put in her hand requesting an interview on the part of a party who could aid her in the game she was playing.

When the lady detective received this note, it caused her a great deal of uneasiness.

It told her that some person as cunning as herself was playing against her, and that to a certain extent her little game had been uncovered.

The note showed considerable knowledge as to her methods, as it instructed her to come to the interview in the guise of a man for "convenience and better security's sake."

The tryst was appointed for midnight, and at a place where it would require a person of nerve to go.

Our heroine pondered well upon the subject, and at length determined to brave all dangers and see the adventure through to the end, come what might.

The interview was named for the night of the same day that she had received the note.

At half past eleven o'clock, under cover as the Frenchman, a rôle she had so often assumed, she proceeded to the spot where the meeting was to take place, which was upon an unfrequented street in the lower portion of the city.

She started early, but did not show up on the ground.

For a time she lay low, to take the measure of the party who had called for the meeting.

She had been for some time in her place of observation, when she saw a roughly dressed man pass along the street.

"That's Cameron," was her quiet remark, as she left her hiding-place and proceeded to meet the banker, whose identity she had "dropped to," despite his disguise.

The banker was leaning against a lamp-post, looking around in every direction, when suddenly, like a shadow, the little Frenchman stood before him.

"Ah! you have come?"

"Certainly."

"I am glad."

"Well, what is your business with me?"

"You got my note?"

"I did."

"From that you know that I have perceived your several disguises."

"Well?"

"Now I want to know what your game is that you are playing against me?"

"Can you not wait until the game is played out?"

"No, Miss French Maid; since you have made such wonderful progress in English, I have concluded not to wait."

"Well, do the next best thing."

"You are very defiant."

"I can afford to be."

Mr. Cameron placed his hand behind him, when he was startled by hearing his companion say in a peculiar tone:

"Look here!"

Mr. Cameron did look, and saw that he had been forestalled.

"I am a woman, but I am used to this kind of play, and there are two reasons why you should not attempt any treachery. I came prepared, and you will find that I am the quicker of the two."

"I have no mind to bring on any encounter, especially with a woman."

"What is your business, then?"

"I wish to secure your services in my behalf."

"In plain words, you wish to bribe me to let up on you."

"What have you got to let up on me about?"

"You will learn when the game is played out: in fact, I've got the true history of all your villainies, and I will run you to earth before I am through."

"Taking your word for the truth of what you say, I will give you twenty-five thousand dollars to leave New York for Europe to-morrow."

"A good bribe certainly."

"Will you accept it?"

"No."

"If I make it fifty thousand?"

"No."

"If you do not, you will never be able to play your game out."

"I do not scare."

"Curse you!" yelled Mr. Cameron; and in the fury of the moment, he leaped forward to catch his companion.

It was evident that in the excitement of the moment he had forgotten a former experience, as in a moment he was brought to his knees writhing in agony.

Cameron was a powerful man, and, after the first shock, would have recovered his self-command, and would most probably have overcome his lighter antagonist; but, as he fell to his feet, the lady detective released her hold, and glided away.

Fearful was the rage of the man, as he rose, with his bleeding arms, and started in pursuit; but, alas! the singular woman who had so strangely got the better of him glided out of sight.

The day following the adventure above recorded, Kate Goelet became aware that she was being followed by a pale-faced, slenderly built man.

She tried several dodges, to make sure that she was not mistaken, and then, with a courage that was extraordinary in a woman, she struck a line for a secluded part of the town, in order to give the man a chance to overtake her and show his hand.

She at once concluded that he was some instrument of Cameron's, and, with a shudder, conjectured that his purpose was bad.

She had first met the man down-town, and he had dogged her away beyond the limits of the city.

There is a certain district lying between the city and Harlem, where, along the river front, it is as wild as some spots on the Sound far beyond.

Especially after nightfall is this locality a particularly lonesome and deserted place.

Night had fallen when the lady detective turned toward the river bank.

She had not taken the step through a spirit of fate-daring venturesomeness, but in a belief that it was a matter of safety to run the man to the end of his string while she was on her guard, so as to provide against being taken at some other moment when unprepared for the peril.

On the bank of that river, under cover of the darkness, a most tragic and thrilling incident occurred; but the necessities of our narrative demand that we should defer a record of the adventures until a later period in our tale.

Two hours and a half subsequent to the moment when our heroine was recorded as passing toward the river, followed by the emissary of Cameron, a man might have been seen pacing to and fro across the apartment, along the North River road, where the lady detective had had the adventure with Cameron on the night of the masquerade.

It was well on toward midnight, and Mr. Cameron's face was expressive of great anxiety and concern as he rapidly traversed his room.

At length there came a great ring at his front door bell.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the banker; "that must be my man, as I told him to report the moment he had any news."

A servant soon appeared at the banker's door, and announced that a man, a stranger, was very anxious to see him.

"What kind of a looking man is he?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"A slender man, with a pale face, poorly dressed, and he appears to be very excited, like a man who had just been frightened."

"Show him up to this room at once!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, in a tone and manner going to prove that he had absorbed some of his strange visitor's excitement.

The visitor was shown up to the room where the banker for hours had paced to and fro.

The latter closed the door securely, turned the gas down, and in a low, husky voice asked:

"Well?"

"It is done!" said the man.

"Is she shut up?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CONFEDERATES.

THE man who had thus intruded himself upon the banker, was the same pale-faced party with whom he had been talking in front of the low groggery, and again was the same fellow who had been dogging the steps of the lady detective toward the river.

The banker's face wore a ghastly expression as he again asked:

"Have you really succeeded?"

"I have."

A moment he remained silent, but at length he asked:

"What proof have you brought me?"

The man produced a number of articles, and among other things the very letter which the banker had written to the detective.

"How did you accomplish it?"

"I dogged her all day, and at last some fatal idea drove her to take a course toward the river. I followed close upon her heels, and when she came to a halt just over the bank I rushed upon her."

The banker's face could not assume a more ghastly hue, but a fit of trembling seized him.

At length he said:

"You must come to me some other time for your pay."

"Oh! I can wait for my pay: it is a large sum, you know."

"I promised you five thousand dollars!"

"More than that!"

"More than five thousand dollars?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did I promise you?"

"You promised to make me a rich man."

"Five thousand dollars would make you a rich man!"

"You think so?"

"I do."

"See here, Mr. Cameron, you used me for a purpose. I know why you were afraid of that woman. I didn't take the chances on a job like that without knowing my business."

"See here, fellow, I do not like the way you are talking."

"You will have to like it."

A look of rage came upon the banker's face. Should the proud millionaire be compelled to listen to the insolent talk of a common ruffian?

"How dare you talk to me in that manner?"

"I dare do anything with you now."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, my dear sir, you must not forget that you and I are 'pals!'"

"You and I are what?"

"'Pals.'"

"What do you mean by 'pals'?"

"Why, 'pards.'"

A ghastly look succeeded the expression of rage that had rested upon Mr. Cameron's face.

A terrible realization of the truth came over him.

He began to see in all its enormity the extent of his crime, and in that moment he would have surrendered all the bonds if he could have been loosened from the bond that bound him to the grinning wretch, who, by his manner, indicated that he knew well his power, and intended to use it.

The thought came to him that he must cow down his confederate at once, and he made a motion toward him.

"Hold on, boss! Don't go and try to come any gum-games over your 'pard,' you know. You see I'm jist up to them 'ere games, and I don't take 'em!"

"What do you require to conclude your business with me forever?"

"Well, I guess I'll be satisfied to let you alone on condition that you give me fifty thousand dollars' worth of those bonds you just yanked out of your partner's safe."

With a yell Cameron rushed toward the man, but was brought to a sudden halt.

"Won't work, nobby! I've got you down fine. I didn't go into this 'ere job without knowing the whole lay of the land."

"I would like to know how a scoundrel like you knows anything about my business!"

"See here, boss, we don't go into any fine discussions. You've got those bonds, and you can hand 'em over, if you choose; and if you do, you'll never have any more trouble or annoyance from Frenchy Joe."

"What guarantee have I that you will not come upon me with other demands?"

"Men like me with plenty of stamps get out of a place where they may meet with an accident. You just give me the bonds, and I'll flit."

"I've no bonds. I will give you ten thousand dollars in money."

"It won't do. I wants the fifty thousand, and I wants it in the bonds."

"You go away, and come here to-morrow, and I will see what I can do."

"No, no, boss. I know you, now; you see, you could get some other chap to slit my gizzard for about five hundred, and save forty-nine thousand five hundred dollars. Won't do; and, besides, I ain't got no license to linger around here; that 'ere stiff may come to the top at any time, and make it hot for the surgeon."

"I have nothing in the house to give you."

"Well, go to where you got it."

"See here, my man, come here in the morning, and I will conclude terms with you."

"Can't wait; you know I'm a thief, and might be nipped any moment; I must 'lite out.'"

Mr. Cameron would gladly have given the fifty thousand in bonds to have got rid of the fellow, Frenchy Joe.

In fact, the banker had at last learned the bitterness of crime, and he would have given up all his plunder to have got out of the horrid scrape into which he had been led.

Already had he learned that even successful crime brings no pleasure, but, on the contrary, a load of miseries, under which the strongest man must in time succumb.

He remembered that he held twenty thousand dollars' worth of bonds that were not a part of the stolen ones.

The latter had but that day come into his possession.

He feared to give the others, lest in trying to dispose of them Frenchy Joe might precipitate a grand catastrophe.

"I have twenty thousand dollars in bonds; if you will take them and leave, you shall have them."

"When?"

"To-night."

"At once?"

"Yes."

"All right! I will take the twenty thousand."

"Where will you go to?"

"Well, may be South America."

"I will never see you again?"

"Never on this business, I reckon."

Mr. Cameron went into the adjoining room and closed and locked the door behind him.

Frenchy Joe stole across the room toward the door through which the banker had passed, and a most wonderful and remarkable scene followed.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BONDS "HOCKED."

FRENCHY JOE drew from his pocket a little instrument of most singular construction and inserted it in the keyhole of the door.

A few moments passed, and then he removed his instrument, and with a satisfied grunt stole away.

An instant later the room door opened and George Cameron came forth.

In his hand the banker carried a number of bonds; addressing Frenchy Joe, he said:

"Now, then, if I give these to you, you will leave the town at once?"

"I will."

"Will you so swear?"

Frenchy Joe laughed and answered:

"You might as well swear a rattlesnake as force an oath from a scoundrel; all you have to do is to give me the bonds and take my word."

"You must swear."

"I will not swear to-night; keep your bonds, I know a way in which I may make more money out of certain information I possess than by making any promises."

The banker was bothered as to what he should do, but at length he said:

"Here, take the bonds; I will trust you."

Strangely enough the thief suddenly displayed a great reluctance to receive the bonds which a few moments before he had been so anxious to become possessed of.

"I can call on you to-morrow and we will talk matters over," he said.

"No, no, take the bonds; I promised them, and I choose to keep my word."

Frenchy Joe received the bonds, and moving toward the door, said:

"I will go now."

"I will not see you again, I trust."

"You will see me once more, and after that I will make myself scarce."

Frenchy Joe, after having delivered himself of this evas-

ive answer, left the room, passed down through the hall and out of the front door.

It was a singular fact, however, that he did not leave the grounds, but skulked away between the rows of trees, and when a good distance from the house dropped down in the grass and showed a disposition to hang around awhile, as though he had some fell purpose in view.

An hour passed, and the mysterious Frenchy Joe rose from his hiding-place, and crept around to that part of the house where the light had gleamed from George Cameron's room.

All was still and dark.

Then the man stole back to the parlor window, produced a number of burglar's tools, and opened a passage through into the parlor.

Once within the house, he proceeded upstairs to the door of the room adjoining the one where George Cameron slept.

The skillful use of an instrument, provided for the purpose, admitted him into this room, when from a bag which he had brought with him he produced several articles suggestive of a most extraordinary proceeding.

Having arranged the articles, he stole into George Cameron's bedroom.

The banker was in bed. The robber stole beside his bed, and after saturating a handkerchief with some colorless liquid, he put it to the sleeping man's nostrils.

Having stupefied his victim, the man placed a gag in the banker's mouth, adjusted handcuffs upon his wrists, and securely bound his feet, thus leaving him bound, gagged, and helpless.

Having made everything secure against interruption, the robber produced a dark lantern, and at length disclosed the main purpose of his most extraordinary maneuvers.

He arranged his light so that the rays fell upon a certain portion of the floor, over which an elegant mat had been spread.

The man drew aside the mat, removed a piece of carpet which, singularly enough, needed no cutting.

When the carpet had been removed, a piece of the flooring was raised, and a little secret closet, or a place used as a secret depository was reached.

From the secret place the man drew forth a middling-sized box.

The box he placed directly under the rays of light from his dark lantern, and a grim smile broke over his evil face as he remarked:

"The second thief is the best owner."

A key was in the box, and when it was opened a large number of bonds and papers were disclosed.

"Not a moment to spare!" now muttered the man, as he shut down the lid of the box, turned the key, and stole out of the room.

Upon the day following the scene above described George Cameron arrived at the banking-house at a late hour.

The man looked fully twenty years older than he had when he left the office the night before.

His partner, Mr. Comstock, noticed his appearance, and, in a tone of astonishment, exclaimed:

"Why, Cameron, what on earth is the matter with you? You are a sick man!"

"I have passed a bad night," answered Mr. Cameron, and he showed no disposition to answer any more questions or give any explanations.

After remaining a short time at the office, he went out.

Ten minutes later Kate Goelet entered the office.

"It's done," she said, in her short, direct, sententious manner.

"What is done?"

"The bonds are recovered intact, and the thief is run down."

"You have recovered the bonds?" almost screamed Mr. Comstock.

"I have."

"Then Henry Wilbur has confessed?"

A strange smile played over the lady detective's face.

"You have something to tell me?"

"I have—a long story."

"I am ready to listen."

The lady detective related her whole experience in the recovery of the bonds.

The banker could hardly believe his own ears.

When the story was concluded, he exclaimed:

"I never did believe it possible that Henry Wilbur was a thief." At this moment Mr. Cameron re-entered the office.

All hands entered an inner room, and a long consultation ensued.

Mr. Cameron had been run to earth, and begged for mercy.

What followed our readers can readily anticipate.

A dissolution of the firm immediately followed.

For certain reasons no prosecution followed against Mr. Cameron.

The man was furnished money to retire to Europe.

In the meantime Henry Wilbur was released, and from Mr. Comstock subsequently heard the whole story of the faithfulness of the lady detective.

But one mystery remains to be explained: Kate Goelet had overcome the fellow who had followed her on the rocks, and getting herself up to represent him, had appeared to Mr. Cameron, and had recovered the bonds as described.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END.

Upon the day following the scenes above depicted, Kate Goelet, the lady detective, called at the banking-house of Attry, Comstock & Co., and made a formal surrender of the recovered bonds.

Her reward, after a division with the detective office, amounted to twenty-five thousand dollars.

Subsequently, in the office of Chief Young, she said:

"I have closed my career as a detective."

"How is that?" asked the chief. "Keep at it, and in a few years you will be a wealthy woman."

"No; it was necessity that drove me to engage in so unlady-like a trade, and now that the necessity is removed, I shall leave the business."

"You have a snug sum enough to live on?"

"Yes; I have made enough to settle my mother and her family comfortably for the rest of their lives, and I have these last earnings for my own support."

"When you leave the service, Miss Kate Goelet, one of the best detective brains that ever hunted a rogue will be withdrawn!"

"I thank you for the compliment, and yet I must say, despite my success, the duty has always been distasteful."

The next day Kate Goelet went down east to visit her mother.

She had departed without one word of warning to Henry Wilbur, not even dropping him a note saying good-bye.

Henry called to inquire about her, and was told she had returned to her home.

He asked where that home was.

The chief could not tell him; and all he could say was that it was somewhere in the vicinity of Boston.

Henry determined to turn detective.

He resolved to hunt up Kate Goelet, the beautiful and wonderful woman who had done him such extraordinary service.

Henry was a shrewd young man, but, do his best, he could not discover the home of the woman he sought.

At length he detemined to return to New York.

On one of the Sound boats he noticed a veiled lady enter a state-room.

There was something that struck him as familiar in the lady's form, and he watched that state-room until he saw her come forth.

It was late, and most of the passengers had retired to their state-rooms, when the lady whom our hero was watching passed along and seated herself in one of the arm-chairs on the rear upper deck.

Henry followed, and, advancing toward her, said:

"I can not be mistaken. I am addressing Miss Goelet, the lady who has placed me under so great an obligation."

"My name is Goelet," answered the lady detective, coldly.

"Heaven! is it possible that you do not recognize me?" exclaimed Henry.

"Yes; I recognize you. I did so when you first came on the boat."

"And you would not address me?"

"I did not."

"And I have been searching all over the State of Massachusetts to find you."

"To find me?"

"Yes."

"Indeed! and why do you wish to find me?" answered Kate, still in a cold, chilling tone.

"Can you not guess?"

"I can not."

"Will you not try?"

"I would not know how."

"You certainly must suspect."

"I do not."

"Kate, I love you, and that is why I have been searching for you."

Henry could see behind the veil that his companion showed considerable agitation, but it was in the coldest of tones that she said, after a moment,

"What wild nonsense is this?"

"It is no nonsense; I speak from the bottom of my heart."

"The idea!" ejaculated Kate, in a contemptuous tone.

"What idea?"

"That the refined, highly cultured, well born and bred Henry Wilbur could honestly profess love to a woman who had associated in all kinds of rough company, and mixed in all kinds of horrid scenes while performing her duty as a professional detective!"

"Your life only proves what a noble and virtuous woman you are."

"You love Mary Clarkson, and it is only a feeling of gratitude that prompts you to come and offer your love to me. Why, I am almost an old maid!"

Henry was silent.

"Ah, ha! you dare not answer when I tell you that you love Mary Clarkson?"

"I tell you that I love you."

"No, no; you can not deceive me, it is Mary Clarkson you love!"

"I may have fancied the lady you mention, once upon a time, but I tell you that I love you!"

"And I tell you that it is me that you fancy, and that it is Mary Clarkson that you love."

"Even if I did love that woman, she has gone away. I know not where to find her, and I certainly shall not attempt to hunt her up, especially when my heart is really given to you."

"And you really love me?"

"I do."

"But the moment you meet Mary Clarkson again all your love for me would vanish."

"Never!"

"I would like to see you put to the test. I tell you I understand human nature pretty well."

"I wish I could be put to the test."

"You really would like to be put to the test?"

"I would."

"Then you shall. Mary Clarkson is a friend of mine, and I will arrange for you to meet her without informing her of the object of the meeting."

"And if I stand this test, will you really believe me when I assert that I love you alone?"

"I will," answered Kate, in a constrained voice.

Two days succeeding the events above recorded, Henry Wilbur started one night to go to a house where he was to meet Mary Clarkson, in accordance with a plan that had been arranged by Kate Goelet.

Arrived at the house, he was shown into the parlor, and a few moments later Mary Clarkson entered the room.

The situation would be an awkward one to a less self-possessed person than our hero, but he at once arose and greeted the lovely woman in a frank and hearty manner.

Miss Clarkson, however, appeared greatly ill at ease, and only answered him in monosyllables.

After remaining for some time, Henry arose to take his departure, when suddenly Mary placed her hand upon his arm, and gazing into his eyes in the most winning manner, said:

"You are not going to leave me thus abruptly?"

"Yes," answered Henry, coldly.

"And have you forgotten all the professions you once made to me?"

"Yes," answered Henry, with the same cool nonchalance.

"And you are going to desert me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well, I have discovered that I love another."

"Ah, you heartless man! and you tell me this in such a cruel manner."

"I must tell you the truth."

"And who is the lady you love?"

"Well, her name is Kate Goelet; I believe you are already acquainted with her."

"And do you really love Kate Goelet?"

"I love her as man never loved woman before," answered Henry, in an enthusiastic and earnest manner.

"Henry," murmured Mary, in a tone different from any she had used before, "are you really sincere, and on your honor is it not a feeling of gratitude instead of love that animates you?"

"When Kate Goelet becomes my wife, it will take me just two seconds to convince her that it is not gratitude, but the warmest and most passionate love."

"Henry!"

"Well?"

"I have deceived you."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; can you forgive me?"

There was a strange expression upon Mary Clarkson's face, and yet it was beaming with happiness.

"I can forgive you; but how have you deceived me?"

"I am Kate Goelet. I have used my art to appear to you in two characters."

"And you thought you had succeeded?"

"Why, Henry, what are you going to tell me?"

"I am going to tell you, darling, that I have never been deceived for one moment. A lover's eyes can not be so easily blinded. I have known you all along, in all your disguises, as my beautiful, brave, patient, heroic and loving Kate!"

"Ah, Henry!" murmured the lady detective, as she fell into the strong, brave arms outstretched to receive her in their warm embrace.

* * * * * * *

Henry Wilbur and his wife are well known in New York society; and Kate Goelet's husband is constantly heard to say that, if his wife had been born a man, she would have rivaled Napoleon the Grand. And he does say that she is the best, handsomest, and smartest woman in the world.

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